

## Aristotle on Prescription

# Philosophia Antiqua

A SERIES OF STUDIES ON ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

## *Editorial Board*

C.J. Rowe (*Durham*)  
K.A. Algra (*Utrecht*)  
F.A.J. de Haas (*Leiden*)  
J. Mansfeld (*Utrecht*)  
D.T. Runia (*Melbourne*)  
Ch. Wildberg (*Princeton*)

## *Previous Editors*

J.H. Waszink †  
W.J. Verdenius †  
J.C.M. Van Winden †

VOLUME 152

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/pha*

# Aristotle on Prescription

*Deliberation and Rule-Making in Aristotle's  
Practical Philosophy*

*By*

Francesca Alesse



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Alesse, Francesca, author.

Title: Aristotle on prescription : deliberation and rule-making in Aristotle's practical philosophy / by Francesca Alesse.

Description: Boston : Brill, 2018. | Series: Philosophia antiqua, ISSN 0079-1687 ; Volume 152 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018039973 (print) | LCCN 2018042363 (ebook) |

ISBN 9789004385399 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004385382 (hardback : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Aristotle. | Ethics. | Decision making.

Classification: LCC B491.E7 (ebook) | LCC B491.E7 A435 2018 (print) |

DDC 171/.3-dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018039973>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 0079-1687

ISBN 978-90-04-38538-2 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-38539-9 (e-book)

Copyright 2019 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Hes & De Graaf, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Rodopi, Brill Sense, Hotei Publishing, mentis Verlag, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh and Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA. Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

*In memoriam patris carissimi*





# Contents

Preface IX

Acknowledgements XI

Note to the Reader XII

## 1 The Reasons for This Research 1

- 1 The Focus of This Research. Aristotle Reflects on Prescription 1
- 2 The Historical Background: the Debate on Prescription in the V and IV Centuries 14
- 3 Aristotle's Criticism of Socrates 29
- 4 Prescription in Plato's *Republic* 45
- 5 The Reasons for a Historiographical Inquiry. Synopsis of the Book 49

## 2 Problems and Debates 54

- 1 The Relationship between Deliberation and the So-Called Practical Syllogism 54
- 2 The Relationship between the Logical Form of Deliberation and Practical Syllogism 64
- 3 The Object of Deliberation 70
- 4 Circumstances. The Particularistic Interpretation 78
- 5 The Shaping of Habit 84
- 6 Concluding Remarks on the Debate about Practical Reasoning 88

## 3 Deliberation and Prescription 94

- 1 Preliminary Remarks: Deliberation as Procedural Reasoning 94
- 2 The Structure of Deliberation 102
- 3 The Hypothetical Method 108
- 4 The Mathematical Model 116
- 5 The Remote End 121
- 6 Desire, Deliberation and Prescription 128
- 7 Deliberative Imagination and Recollection 133
- 8 The Conversion of Deliberation into Syllogism 142
- 9 The "Advantage" of Syllogism. Normative Opinions 151

<b>4 Prescriptive Reason and Practical Wisdom</b>	<b>158</b>
1 Preliminary Remarks on Aristotle's Notion of Prescription	158
2 The Semantic and Conceptual Domain of Prescription. The Platonic Background	163
3 Prescriptive Logos as a Psychic Faculty	173
4 The Argumentative and Discursive Nature of Prescriptive Logos	181
5 The Prescriptive Function of Practical Wisdom	187
6 Prescription and Moral Character	198
7 <i>Ergon</i> and <i>chresis</i>	202
<b>5 Prescription and Architectonic Order</b>	<b>209</b>
1 Prescription and Politics. Preliminary Remarks	209
2 The Difference between Action and Production	216
3 The Relationship of Prescription with Use and Possession	223
4 Prescriptive Wisdom and True Opinion	234
5 Brief Remarks on the Guiding Functions of the State	241
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>Index Nominum et Rerum</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>Index Locorum</b>	<b>265</b>



## Preface

The secondary literature on Aristotle's practical philosophy is massive. A great number of illuminating studies have been provided on practical reasoning, deliberation, choice *vel* decision, the so-called practical syllogism, as well as legislation and political authority. All of these are key notions in Aristotle's ethics and politics and somehow related to the concept of rule and the act of prescribing a particular action or a line of conduct. Besides, Aristotle's treatment of the modalities and causes of human behaviour arguably implies the possibility of *codifying* types of action and establishing, to a certain extent, regular and constant rules of conduct. Human "movement" is a very special kind of animal movement, in that it is dominated by "practical calculation", i.e. weighing several opportunities, evaluating situations and circumstances, imagining the future.

Nonetheless, the question of rule-making in Aristotle's practical philosophy has not received the attention it deserves. It is widely believed that Aristotle was only concerned, at the most, with *decision*-making, meant as a general psychological process that enables man to arrive particular and contingent choices (or decisions). In my opinion, *rule*-making firmly underpins Aristotle's ethical and political texts. Defining a rule means indicating a course of action to solve a practical problem and to get a clear aim. This course of action has to be both sufficiently specific to meet situational difficulties, and sufficiently general and constant over time to offer a code of behaviour to be used in similar situations. Furthermore, when we establish rules and prescribe them, we demonstrate the ability of directing not only our own life but also, more importantly, other people's lives. In the latter case, we assume ends which are not of our immediate concern, in the same way that a doctor is concerned only with others' health. My thesis is that Aristotle has deeply reflected on this problem, distinguishing rules and prescriptions from individual, episodic choices and decisions, and admitting a prescriptive reasoning which is formally equal to any syllogism, but substantially different from a scientific explication. Prescriptive reasoning does not aim at explaining a fact or an action, while revealing its final cause and agent's intention; prescriptive reasoning is a special kind of reasoning which indicates the best thing to do (the most feasible, or the most honorable, depending either on the quality of the end for the sake of which an action is to be pursued, or on the circumstances).

Some recent scholars attribute to Aristotle the idea that action is mainly the result of experience and sensible understanding of every contingent situation. From such a standpoint, Aristotle would be a "particularist" philosopher.

My aim is to show that Aristotle, on the contrary, has recognized the need for codifying practical rules which, although pertinent to instable and accidental reality, may be sufficiently constant over time. Aristotle is at least in part induced to think about the need for both stable and flexible rules by the celebrated criticisms Plato addresses to the “written law”, i.e. political law. But what characterizes Aristotle’s reflection about prescription is his enlarging the horizon of investigation. The prescriptive limits Plato recognizes to the written *nomos*—its generality with respect to different situations and human characters; its fixity with respect to changing circumstances—lead Aristotle to a total rethinking of the prescriptive issue in order to grasp its foundations in the conception of deliberate choice, the theory of reasoning, and that of the structure of human soul. My intention is precisely to bring to light that the premises of Aristotle’s notion of political and legislative prescription reside in some of the fundamental parts of his practical philosophy. At least two factors emerging from the inquiry seem to have confirmed my working hypothesis. First, the possibility that deliberation, which is a heuristic search for the means to an end and a kind of hypothetical reasoning, can be converted into a deduction, that is, into a syllogism. This syllogism may be defined as prescriptive because it is able to deduce a choice, or decision, from a premise expressing either a desired end or an agreed norm, so revealing in the conclusion the appropriate action to the end. Second, Aristotle admits that, although human action is caused by desire, it is possible to deliberate about the means to an end without the desire for that end being *in act*. Deliberating subjects may both (a) consider an end which is *not* object of their own actual desire as desirable by someone else or in given situations, thus reasoning about the appropriate means to it and without coming to an action; and (b) consider a certain purpose for which it is necessary to deliberate, as an intermediate step to achieving a higher end. In both cases, deliberating subjects may prescribe for other people the performance of what they, and not those other people, have deliberated. This is the proper work of legislators when deliberating and prescribing particular rules of conduct for the sake of particular ends in various fields of social life. They do not actually desire those ends for the sake of which they prescribe. They desire *in act* just the ultimate end, the common good, and consider the ends for the sake of which they prescribe as the intermediate stages and instrumental conditions in view of the ultimate end. Prescription as guiding own and others’ individual actions provides the model for rule-making at the level of society and political community.

## Acknowledgements

I am sincerely grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of my manuscript for providing acute remarks and precious suggestions, thus helping me to clarify several points of my argument; and to Enrico Berti, Carlo Natali, and Christopher Rowe with whom I had the opportunity—and the fortune—to discuss some controversial passages in Aristotle.

I wish to thank the Editors of *Philosophia Antiqua*, for accepting my work in the series, and the Acquisitions Editor Jennifer Pavelko, for her solicitude, kindness, and friendly cooperation.

My special and sincere thanks are addressed to Davide Del Forno for translating my text into English and discussing with me various questions of translation and interpretation of technical terminology.

## Note to the Reader

The study of ancient philosophical texts involves, as is well known, problems of translation, terminology, and contextualisation. I have tried to be as consistent as possible in using English translations of several key terms and concepts that I have kept constantly throughout the book. Translations of Aristotelian texts all derive from *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by J. Barnes, Princeton University Press, 1995 (sixth printing with corrections). The translator of each work is mentioned at the first citation. Translations of texts from other authors are also indicated in the notes. In some cases, I have slightly modified these translations. In particular, I have systematically adopted the verb *to prescribe* for ἐπιτάττειν, and *prescription* for the nouns ἐπίταξις and ἐπίταγμα; *virtue* for ἀρετή; *desire* for ὄρεξις; *appetite* for ἐπιθυμία; *volition* for βούλησις; *choice* for προαίρεσις; *state* for ἔξις. I have rendered σοφία by *theoretical wisdom*, and φρόνησις by *practical wisdom*. Finally, I have used the term *limit* to translate ὅρος in the contexts in which the theory of the “right mean” is treated. Greek texts are taken, as a rule, from the various *Oxford Classical Texts*. Alternative critical editions are mentioned when necessary.

As to conceptual and historical contextualization of the Aristotelian texts that are relevant to this research, I have certainly taken into account the prevailing views about the probable chronological order of the two *Ethics* and their relationship with both the *Politics* and Plato’s last work, the *Laws*. Nevertheless, I have chosen to give priority to the coherence of Aristotelian ideas about the issue of rules, rather than highlighting presumed changes in perspective from *Eudemian* to *Nicomachean* and *Politics*.

# The Reasons for This Research

## 1 The Focus of This Research. Aristotle Reflects on Prescription

The focus of this research is Aristotle's view of prescription. By "prescription" I mean the single and particular rule of conduct as well as the procedure of formulating rules of conduct. As I hope to show, Aristotle admits the need for prescriptive rules that have three main characteristics. They conclude a line of practical reasoning, i.e. a deliberation, and should not be confused with the end for the sake of which they are given. They are particular because they must take into account the circumstances in which those who are given the rules find themselves. Finally, prescriptive rules are generally deliberated by someone for the conduct of someone else. A prescriptive rule is analogous to choice, as it derives from the same deliberative reasoning that produces choice; in the case of prescription, however, those who deliberate do not act themselves, but prescribe other people a certain action (or course of actions). This is significant in that it involves the adoption of a deliberative reasoning aimed at attaining a good which is mostly someone else's good, not the good of those who deliberate. Aristotle regards deliberation as generally starting from an aim posited by desire.<sup>1</sup> We have to assume, then, that the deliberation concluding with a prescription, not a choice, either does not imply the *actual* desire for that with a view to which a certain conduct, or line of conduct, is prescribed; or implies the desire for a *different* good from the one for whose attainment a certain conduct is prescribed.

Aristotle did not thematize a theory of prescription, in that he did not devote a treatment to the notion of "prescription", or of "rule of conduct".<sup>2</sup> However,

1 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1226a13–17 and 1226b16–17; *Eth. nic.* 1139b3–4; on the relationship between τέλος and ὁρεξις see *De an.* 433a10–24; *De motu anim.* 700b25–26.

2 The presence of a theory of practical rules in Aristotle has been debated and, more than often, excluded. According to many scholars, Aristotle is mainly concerned with the problem of learning ethical virtue as an habit and, at the same time, the problem of deducing a contingent choice from general moral principles. See, for the dominant perspective, J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, OUP, New York-Oxford 1993, 94: "The virtuous Aristotelian's 'perception' of what [the agent] should do emerges naturally from stress on the co-operative development of the affective and intellectual sides of virtue. As many have noted, it sits ill with a stress on rule-following, and Aristotle does not give us adequate indication of whether we should try to reconcile them as just suggested, or perhaps by regarding the rules as rules

as is shown by quite a few passages of his works, he did reflect on this topic with respect to at least two different issues: political deliberation<sup>3</sup> and the standard of action according to right reason (or theory of the mean between excess and defect).<sup>4</sup> Aristotle explicitly deals with the topic of prescription while discussing the political law and its limits in the wake of Plato's remarks on written laws, in *Politicus*, 294a10–296a3. He endorses many aspects of Plato's criticism.<sup>5</sup> Most notably, he takes the view that written laws will be never able to provide for all particular cases or adjust to a shift in circumstances.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Aristotle takes up, as the starting point of political inquiry, the most important issue raised by Plato's criticism of written laws, i.e. whether one should prefer the rule of the best ruler or of the best laws.<sup>7</sup> His conclusion seems to be that law is sovereign and preferable even to the best of rulers, as it is free from passion.<sup>8</sup> A significant passage focussed on political *nomos* enables us to outline in a fairly precise way the range of problems connected to the general topic of prescription:

---

of thumb, extracted ex post facto from the virtuous person's intuitive judgements rather than leading him to them ... Perhaps Aristotle is thinking of highly general rules, which could be reformulated without too much strain in terms of the pursuit of some good ... But nothing of this kind is to be found in Aristotle's texts ... Aristotle has in fact not thought through the place of rules in the virtuous person's thought". A widespread scepticism about the existence of a reflection on rules in Aristotle is also in agreement with the so-called "particularism" which some recent scholars are disposed to attribute to him, see *infra* pp. 78–84.

3 Cf. e.g. *Polit.* 1281b40–1282b7; 1286a10–30; 1299a25–30, etc.

4 Cf. e.g. *Eth. eud.* 1222a6–12; 1222b5–8; 1231b33–35; *Eth. nic.* 1106b25–26; 1138b18–25.

5 The relation of Aristotle's conception of political law to Plato's has been a matter of debate. The opinion according to which Aristotle's general idea of legislation stems from a polemical attitude against Plato, as found for instance in G. Bien, *Die Grundlegung der politischen Philosophie bei Aristoteles*, Alber Verlag, Munich 1980<sup>2</sup>, esp. 18–44, has been recently replaced by a more balanced line of interpretation. Cf. F. Lisi, "The Concept of Law in Aristotle's Politics", in J.J. Cleary-G.M. Gurtler (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 16, Brill, Leiden 2000, 29–53; C. Horn, "Law, Governance, and Political Obligation", in M. Deslauriers-P. Destrée (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, CUP, Cambridge 2013, 223–246.

6 In *Polit.* 1269a10–18 Aristotle says that it is almost impossible to delineate a political constitution in detail (ἀκριβῶς); the constitution necessarily consists of general directions, whereas actions always relate to particular cases (καθόλου γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον γράφειν, αἱ δὲ πράξεις περὶ τῶν καθ' ἑκαστόν εἰσιν). Therefore, it is necessary at times to change the laws. He adds, however, that such changes should be rare and cautious and made only when the benefit that we get from them is much higher than the damage caused by the instability of laws and loss of their authority. In *Polit.* 1282b1–6 Aristotle insists that it is not easy to lay down general rules for all cases but also that the laws are sovereign over the rulers.

7 Cf. *Polit.* 1286a7–9. The question is advanced by Plato in *Pol.* 292a, c, 293a–c.

8 Cf. 1286a9–25, partic. 17–21.

We will begin by inquiring whether it is more advantageous to be ruled by the best man or by the best laws. The advocates of kingship maintain that the laws speak only in general terms (τὸ καθόλου μόνον), and cannot prescribe in relation to circumstances (ἀλλ'οὐ πρὸς τὰ προσπίπτοντα ἐπιτάττειν); and that for any science to abide by written rules is absurd. In Egypt the physician is allowed to alter his treatment after the fourth day, but if sooner, he takes the risk. Hence, it is clear that a government acting according to written laws is plainly not the best. Yet surely the ruler cannot dispense with the general principle (τὸν λόγον, τὸν καθόλου) which exists in law; and that is a better ruler which is free from passion than that in which it is innate. Whereas the law is passionless, passion must always sway the heart of man. Yes, it may be replied, but then on the other hand an individual will be better able to deliberate in particular cases (βουλεύσεται περὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα κάλλιον). The best man, then, must legislate, and laws must be passed, but these laws will have no authority when they miss the mark, though in all other cases retaining their authority. But when the law cannot determine a point at all, or not well, should the one best man or should all decide? According to our present practice assemblies meet, sit in judgement, deliberate, and decide, and their judgements all relate to individual cases (αὐταὶ δ' αἱ κρίσεις εἰσι παῖσαι περὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον).<sup>9</sup>

This passage makes quite clear both the reasons why written laws lose their prescriptive authority and the reasons why the rule of the law is preferable to that of a man. Laws have no authority when they “miss the mark” because their *written* text fails to provide for all the particular cases for which they are invoked. On the other hand, laws are free from passion, and passion is a human quality that undermines the fairness of deliberation and judgement. The passage as a whole suggests that Aristotle thinks it necessary that both normative universality and prescriptive particularity should be guaranteed. The rulers, who have to deliberate about particular cases not provided for by written laws, must possess the general normative principles according to which they will make their decisions. This allows us to make two points we will develop later. First, within the domain of political investigation, Aristotle holds that law-making and deliberation are not the same thing. Law-making is the promulgation of a universal

9 *Polit.* 1286a7–27. Transl. by B. Jowett. Cf. also 1287a20–30: “The rule of the law, it is argued, is preferable to that of any individual. On the same principle, even if it be better for certain individuals to govern, they should be made only guardians and ministers of the law ... there may indeed be cases which the law seems unable to determine, but such cases a man could not determine either”.

norm to which the conduct of many people should be adjusted, rather than a specific practical rule to be applied in a given context. The observance of law can be seen either as a general aim for the sake of which we abide by some more specific rules (I do such things as paying tributes or performing military service *in order to* obey to laws and be a model citizen); or as a general praxis for the sake of an ultimate end (the common good, the good of the State). Political deliberation, then, as compared to the law, is a more particular prescriptive act, since it orders the application of the law in some domain of social life. Second, even within the more general domain of practical and ethical philosophy, Aristotle can be viewed as distinguishing between the notion of *norm* and that of *prescription*, the former being a principle to which our views on the good, happiness, etc. adjust; the second a particular rule resulting from deliberative reasoning and susceptible of an immediate practical application. This difference will turn out to be extremely important for understanding the difference between the rulers and the ruled, when they are both free and equal by birth.

Even if the government of law is preferable because “dispassionate” and conforming to reason, whereas the government of man is inevitably prone to arbitrariness of passion, the problem of the prescriptive limit of written laws should not be overlooked. Aristotle tries to overcome this limit by the idea of a twofold political function, i.e. the legislative and the deliberative (or prescriptive) one.<sup>10</sup> He thereby attempts to preserve the sovereignty of law while making possible its application to particular cases. This would prevent the specific deliberations of ruling bodies from prevailing over the laws—which may happen in degenerate democracies:

The law ought to be supreme over all, and the magistracies should judge of particulars (δεῖ γὰρ τὸν μὲν νόμον ἄρχειν πάντων τῶν δὲ καθ’ ἕκαστα τὰς ἀρχάς), and only this should be considered a constitution. So that if democracy be a real form of government, the sort of system in which all things are regulated by decrees is clearly not even a democracy in the true sense of the word, for decrees relate only to particulars.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Polit.* 1287b16–24: Aristotle claims that it is impossible to *legislate* upon everything that is a subject of *deliberation*. I presume that in Aristotle’s frame of mind the act of βουλευέσθαι is contiguous with that of ἐπιτάττειν though they are not the same, cf. *Polit.* 1299a25–27. Both βουλευέσθαι and ἐπιτάττειν are related to particular cases, many of which are not contemplated by laws. I deal with this topic in more detail in Ch. Five.

<sup>11</sup> *Polit.* 1292a32–36. Ross accepted Richards’s supplement πάντων <τῶν καθόλου>; see C.D.C. Reeve, *Aristotle. Politics. Transl. with Introduction and Notes*, Hackett, Indianapolis-Cambridge 1998, ad loc.: “The law should rule universally over everything ...”; the second



Aristotle here is arguably attributing to certain ruling bodies the task that in 1286a11 he characterized as “prescribing in relation to circumstances”, πρὸς τὰ προσπίπτοντα ἐπιτάττειν. As we shall see, the verb ἐπιτάττειν is the term Aristotle uses to indicate the act of prescribing. We can therefore claim that, at least from a general point of view, a particular prescription is the conclusion of an act of deliberation that does not take the place of such a universal normative principle as the law, but applies the universal normative principle to all the situations requiring it. Therefore, the “guardians” (νομοφύλακες) and “ministers” (ὑπηρέται) of the laws, mentioned at *Polit.* 1287a21, preserve laws not only by punishing those who breach them, but also by identifying all the particular cases requiring the application of a certain law and that are not explicitly mentioned in its text.

Aristotle’s interest in prescription is clear from another crucial domain of his practical philosophy, i.e. the theory of the mean between excess and defect and of action conforming to right reason. In *Eth. eud.* 1222a5 ff. Aristotle equates right reason, i.e. the standard to which those possessing a virtuous habit adjust their every action, with the mean between excess and defect. He also points out that each moral virtue is *per se*<sup>12</sup> a mean between excess and defect in pleasure and pain. More importantly, both excess and defect with respect to μεσότης can be considered either absolutely or in relation to a *limit* (1222a16–17: ἢ ἀπλῶς ἢ πρὸς τινα ὅρον). The concept of “limit” (ὅρος) plays a crucial role in other passages that we will discuss in due course; in this passage from the *Eudemean Ethics* its presence suggests that the norm of right reason and mean should be determined also according to recurring circumstances, types of people, etc.<sup>13</sup>

---

anonymous reader proposes to translate this emended text as “the law should rule over all general [principles]”.

12 The text of 1222a10–11 is controversial and I follow the new reading proposed by Christopher Rowe: ἀναγκαῖον ἂν εἴη τὴν ἡθικὴν ἀρετὴν τὴν καθ’ αὐτὸ ἐκάστην (instead of τὴν καθ’ αὐτὸν ἕκαστον of the main manuscripts) μεσότητα εἶναι. With the proposed reading the meaning will be that each ἀρετή is a μεσότης καθ’ αὐτό, i.e. not κατὰ συμβεβηκός, an idea which is consistent with 1221b4 (Rowe *per litteras*). All editors so far have expunged τὴν before καθ’ αὐτόν and Walzer/Mingay have also expunged αὐτόν, reading καθ’ ἕκαστον. Ross, followed by Woods (*Aristotle’s Eudemean Ethics, Book I, II, and VIII, with translation and commentary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1982, note p. 206) emended καθ’ αὐτόν ἕκαστον into καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐκάστην. In the general frame of my interpretation, Rowe’s new reading leads to the conclusion that, each moral virtue being essentially and *per se* a mean, prescriptive discipline and rule-making capacity will be particularly needed in order to establish constant, though flexible, rules of conduct. I am grateful to Christopher Rowe for authorizing me to mention his work in progress.

13 A simple but instructive example of this principle is that of the different appreciation of the same commitment by Themistocles and Cimon in support of a great civic enterprise

Although he says almost nothing about how to apply right reason to the single circumstances of life, Aristotle does aim to formulate a prescriptive ethics. This is shown by the following passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Since the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is (τί ἐστίν), but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use), we must examine the nature of actions, namely how we ought to do them (πῶς πρακτέον αὐτάς); for these determine also the nature of the states that are produced, as we have said. Now, that we must act according to right reason is a common principle and must be assumed (κοινὸν καὶ ὑποκείσθω)—it will be discussed later, i.e. both what it is, and how it is related to the other virtues. But this must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely (τύπῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀκριβῶς), as we said at the very beginning that the accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or set of precepts (ὑπὸ παραγγέλων), but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation.<sup>14</sup>

In this passage, Aristotle makes the following three points. First, as he explicitly states, his aim is not to give a definition of virtue, but to show how to become virtuous by assuming a moral character. Thus, he makes it clear that he wishes to propose a moral theory that is not just descriptive, but, at least in part, also prescriptive. The main topic of the ethical inquiry is referred to by the words πῶς πρακτέον, which indicate a question about the way to solve a practical problem, not a question about the essence or the cause of something. For Aristotle, therefore, the theory of deliberation, which is a kind of practical reasoning providing an answer to the question *how?*, lies at the heart of the ethical *pragmateia*. Second, Aristotle claims that to be virtuous is widely believed to coincide with acting in accord with right reason. Conformity to right reason

---

(*Eth. eud.* 1233b11–12): the same allocation, i.e. an amount of money or something else, would be too much for the one but fair for the other. In this example the difference is not necessarily due to different wealth status but, more generally, to different ἀξία.

14 *Eth. nic.* 1103b26–1104a10. Transl. by W.D. Ross.

is a presupposition that needs no demonstration, but has to be assumed as a true principle (ὑποκείμεθω). What has to be demonstrated, or rather, the conclusion Aristotle wants us to come to, is the determination of a series of rules of some fairly general prescriptive standards (though not as general as the rule of right reason), which will serve to apply the norm of right reason to the particular circumstances of life. Therefore, we can say that in this passage Aristotle in a sense formulates the most important deliberative reasoning in practical philosophy, which will enable us to act in compliance with right reason and acquire the virtuous habit. Yet conformity to right reason is a criterion that in itself offers no content for action, as is shown by the fact that it is agreed by nearly everyone, whereas the realization of virtue is neither common nor easy for human beings. As a result, it will be necessary to identify more specific criteria, which however will have to be general enough to apply to a whole series of cases or whole groups of people.

Consequently—and this is the third point Aristotle makes in the quoted passage—the search for these criteria or rules, which are more specific than conformity to right reason but still fairly general, will necessarily be conducted in a rather summary way, without the rigour proper to other sciences. This celebrated remark is related to both the view that actions are not eternal and necessary things, and the criticism of written laws for their inability to prescribe action “in an exact way”.<sup>15</sup> The expression τύπω καὶ οὐκ ἀκριβῶς in 1104a1–2 indicates that Aristotle proposes to discuss a prescription problem: how to regulate action in order to acquire a virtuous character, by means of rules of conduct that are both sufficiently detailed and sufficiently regular. Therefore, when he claims that the inquiry about action has to be conducted τύπω, Aristotle is not just referring to its lack of rigour: he is also giving a methodical indication. To understand how to follow right reason we have to outline at least some “types”, i.e. behaviour models, which will apply to some classes of people.<sup>16</sup>

Besides, if general practical inquiries are inaccurate, practical inquiries on specific cases are even more so. Practical inquiries on specific cases are the deliberations carried out by agents aiming to attain a certain end and seeking the suitable means. In this case it is necessary, as Aristotle makes clear, that the agents consider the circumstances in which they are and the means at their dis-

15 Cf. *Polit.* 1269a9–11; 1282b2–6; 1287b16–20. See also *Eth. nic.* 1164b28–29: it is not easy to give exact and precise directions in very specific and variable circumstances.

16 For such a methodical indication, see *Eth. nic.* 1180b8–20, and E. Berti, “Φρόνησις et science politique”, in P. Aubenque-A. Tordesillas (eds.), *Aristote politique. Etudes sur la Politique d’Aristote*, PUF, Paris 1993, 436–459, repr. in E. Berti, *Nuovi studi aristotelici*. III *Filosofia pratica*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2008, 39–59.

positional, since there is no art or *ad hoc* set of precepts to rely on for every single decision. This remark is the key to a correct understanding of Aristotle's previous claims. The fact that for Aristotle no art can teach us, once and for all, what to do on every single occasion of our life, and no precept can guide us in our every action, does not demonstrate that his practical philosophy is not prescriptive: quite the contrary. He goes out of his way to formulate a prescriptive ethics exactly because he believes there is no art of living that can be taught and learnt (such as the one some Sophists claimed they were able to teach); nor is there an art of living of the definitional kind, i.e. based on the view that possessing virtue amounts to knowing its essence, its *τί ἐστιν*, according to Aristotle's interpretation of the Socratic principle that virtue is science. In addition, Aristotle argues that we cannot rely on an ethics made of precepts, such as the one the early literary tradition had transmitted to the classical age, or the more technical one of the "textbooks", which can only be useful to experts. Experts know how to act and prescribe for the inexperienced how to act in compliance with what the experts have deliberated. This is what Aristotle claims in a passage at the end of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he emphasizes the need for a theory of legislation:

While people experienced in any department judge rightly the works produced in it, and understand by what means or how they are achieved, and what harmonises with what, the inexperienced must be content if they do not fail to see whether the work has been well or ill made—as in the case of painting. Now laws are as it were the works of the political art; how then can one learn from them to be a legislator, or judge which are best? Even medical men do not seem to be made by a study of text-books (*ἐκ τῶν συγγραμμάτων*). Yet people try, at any rate, to state not only the treatments, but also how particular classes of people can be cured and should be treated—distinguishing the various states; but while this seems useful to experienced people, to the ignorant it is valueless. Surely, then, while collections of laws, and of constitutions also, may be serviceable to those who can study them and judge what is good or bad and what enactments suit what circumstances, those who got through such collections without a practiced faculty will not have right judgement ...<sup>17</sup>

The claims that *παραγγελίαι* are ineffective (1104a7) and *συγγράμματα* can only be used by experts (1181b2), are not inconsistent with my contention that Aris-

<sup>17</sup> *Eth. nic.* 1181a19–b11.

total wishes to propose a prescriptive ethics. When he criticises traditional precepts, Aristotle means that everyone must rely on reasoning, i.e. assess the situation they are in and the means at their disposal, and choose accordingly the best way to achieve their goal. In principle, then, each one of us should apply to every single situation the standard of right reason, which we all appreciate, and thus be able to determine the mean that will serve as a guide for our action. It is improbable, however, that everyone knows what the mean is in all the particular circumstances requiring its application. Prescriptive ethics is halfway between the universal standard of conformity to reason and the particular deliberation performed by an individual on the decision to be made. Even if a practical choice has to be made through the reasoning of the agent (and not through a pre-established art of living or traditional precepts), some norms will nonetheless be needed to enable one to perform the specific deliberative reasoning. For example, if the commander of a ship has to deliberate, under life-threatening circumstances, about whether to jettison the cargo with which he has been entrusted in order to save human lives, he will have to possess normative opinions prescribing to him, however summarily, to value human life more than cargo, although his usual task is to transport goods, not save lives.<sup>18</sup> To jettison the cargo is a voluntary and deliberate action by the commander in that he could act in a different way: it is up to him to understand that losing human lives in order to accomplish his ordinary task would represent an excess with respect to his virtue as a commander. According to Aristotle's view, the commander needs something more specific than right reason: he needs prescriptive ethics. Prescriptive ethics is the result of a summary inquiry, which is inaccurate because it does not provide universal truths, but rules and "types" of behaviour. Yet this inaccurate character is not altogether negative, for if we had a non-summary and exact practical science, we would have no opportunity to make choices and therefore no matter for deliberation either.

By his criticism of technical precepts, on the other hand, Aristotle wishes to remind us that in politics and law-making, as well as in science, norms are especially difficult to interpret and their use must be the province of experienced magistrates.

A further discussion of right reason and the golden mean is found at the beginning of the VI book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

---

18 The example is taken from *Eth. nic.* 110a8–12 where Aristotle discusses the so-called "mixed actions", that is, actions which are voluntary not because wanted but because deliberated under the circumstances.

Since we have previously said that one ought to choose that which is intermediate, not the excess nor the defect, and that the intermediate is determined by the dictates of reason, let us discuss this. In all the states we have mentioned, as in all other matters, there is a mark to which the man who possesses reason looks, and heightens or relaxes his activity accordingly, and there is a limit (*ῥος*) which determines the mean states which we say are intermediate between excess and defect, being in accordance with right reason. But such a statement, though true, is by no means illuminating; for in all other pursuits which are objects of knowledge it is indeed true to say that we must not exert ourselves nor relax our efforts too much nor too little, but to an intermediate extent and as right reason dictates; but if a man had only this knowledge he would be none the wiser—e.g. we should not know what sort of medicines to apply to our body if someone were to say ‘all those which the medical art prescribes, and which agree with the practice of one who possesses the art’. Hence it is necessary with regard to the states of the soul also not only that this true statement should be made, but also that it should be determined what right reason is and what is the limit that fixes it.<sup>19</sup>

Aristotle is well aware that the standard of the mean is ineffective if not applied to a specific practical content, i.e. a certain action or a type of actions. To establish whether such and such an action, here and now, is the appropriate mean between excess and defect and is in accord with right reason, it is necessary that there should be some kind of rather general regulation, varying according to the different domains of action. To invoke the mean without previously determining, at least in a summary way, what the mean is in the various practical domains and circumstances (in war or in peace, in domestic or public life, etc.), amounts to advising people who suffer from some disorder or pain to treat themselves “as medical science recommends” or to do “what the doctor prescribes”. Such advice not only is ineffective, as it does not heal, but suggests some confusion between those who possess practical knowledge and those who do not. Anyone can give such a generic prescription (“go and see the doctor”), for anyone knows that diseases are treated by medicine, just as anyone knows that the mean is preferable to the excess and defect. This does not mean that one always knows what to do in a specific circumstance. The medical analogy is more significant than seems to be the case at first blush. In Aristotle’s analogy, medicine is a metaphor for acting according to the mean

---

19 *Eth. nic.* 1138b18–34.

and right reason; health a metaphor for the end with a view to which we act abiding by the mean and avoiding excesses and defects. Although everyone knows that diseases are treated by medicine, only doctors can heal the sick. For virtuous practice, however, there seems to exist no science proper. This is a serious problem, since virtuous actions presuppose the possession of a good moral character, or “habit”,<sup>20</sup> and good character is not a matter of knowledge but of desire. Moral virtue belongs to the desiring soul,<sup>21</sup> which practical reason orders to pursue some things and avoid others. This is the specific task of practical reason, and is precisely a *prescriptive* task.

In a context of *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he argues that the notion of good is homonymous and can be said in as many ways as there are categories,<sup>22</sup> Aristotle claims that a universal concept of good would be useless even as a general norm with a view to action:

Perhaps, however, some one might think it worth while to have knowledge of it (*scil.* a good which is universally predicable) with a view to the goods that are attainable and achievable; for having this as a sort of pattern we shall know better the goods that are good for us, and if we know them shall attain them. This argument has some plausibility, but seems to clash with the procedure of the sciences; for all of these, though they aim at some good and seek to supply the deficiency of it, leave on one side the knowledge of the good. Yet that all the exponents of the arts should be ignorant of, and should not even seek, so great an aid is not probable. It is hard, too, to see how a weaver or a carpenter will be benefited in regard to his own craft by knowing this ‘good itself’, or how the man who has viewed the Idea itself will be a better doctor or general thereby. For a doctor seems not even to study health in this way, but the health of man, or perhaps rather the health of a particular man; for it is individuals that he is healing.<sup>23</sup>

The difference between this view and the quoted passages on right reason and the mean is that right reason and the mean between excess and defect are

20 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1103a17–19.

21 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1220a38–39; 1221b38–39; 1227b8; *Eth. nic.* 1104b8–9; 1106b17–18; 1139a21–24, etc.

22 *Eth. nic.* 1096a20–34. The criticism of the synonymy of “good” is related to the criticism of Plato’s conception of the Idea of Good. In the context Aristotle explicitly refers to the theory of Forms in 1096a12–13 and again alludes to it in 1096a35, where he wonders about the real meaning of ἀποτέχαστον. On this topic, see G. Santas, *Goodness and Justice. Plato, Aristotle, and the Moderns*, Blackwell, Oxford 2001, 194–219, partic. 200–204.

23 *Eth. nic.* 1096b35–1097a13.

more determinate notions in a practical sense as compared to “good itself” and, therefore, we cannot regard them as useless for action. However, the example of the doctor who does not pursue the health in general but that of a particular man case by case suggests that general normative principles, such as “good”, “noble”, “prudent”, and so on, cannot be viewed as synonymous because their meaning somehow changes according to the domain of reality they refer to. We can conclude, then, that the even notion of mean between excess and defect takes on different meanings according to the particular domain of action requiring its application. The general norm provides a general guideline for action; prescription establishes specific practical rules, which are suited to a specific domain of action, though still fairly general; the agent interprets and implements the norm by applying the rules to a particular case. The agent’s intelligence and sensitivity play a key role here, for, if practical rules concerning a certain subject matter are “fixed” and made steady, they may reveal the same prescriptive limit as written laws. A prescriptive limit emerges from the analysis of the standard of action as well as from the analysis of the political law. Just as the magistrates and the assembly have to fill in a gap in the law by specific normative acts and *ad hoc* deliberations,<sup>24</sup> so within every other praxis, and particularly within virtuous praxis, practical wisdom determines in each case the limit (*horos*) of the action beyond which there lies excess or defect.

These remarks enable us to make here some further points that we will develop later. Aristotle’s discussion of prescription aims to solve such issues pertaining to *nomos* as Plato had lucidly identified. The more universal the norm, the less prescriptive it is for an individual acting within a specific context. The solution to this problem is to formulate rules of conduct pertaining to different domains of action. Moreover, the discussion of prescription is at the same time a reflection on the origin and the limits of the notion of *authority*. By “authority” I mean a characteristic distinguishing prescriptions from normative opinions with a didactic or dialectic rather than a regulative aim. Prescription entails the observance of what it prescribes. The statement “a good diet is conducive to longevity” suggests a good practice, but if uttered during a medicine class it aims at transmitting knowledge, not at prescribing a good diet. Likewise, if uttered during a debate, the claim “wealth makes life easier”, despite pointing to a desirable goal, does not aim at persuading people to pursue wealth, but at challenging the opposite claim “wealth does not contribute to happiness”. By contrast, a general norm or a rule are prescriptive when they are established and issued within a context *requiring* the solution to a practical problem.

---

24 Cf. *Polit.* 1286a21–28, and 1299a26–28.



Prescriptions, then, are construed as answers to *questions* that people ask themselves throughout their lives and that can be summed up in the question *how?* (πῶς;). For Aristotle the written law may fail to answer because of its generality, i.e. its distance from practical reality. Norms and rules that are as close as possible to the different domains of action are by no means exhaustive, yet they can guide action in a more effective way, though with the essential help of the agent's reasoning and possibly of the required competence.

The solution to the problem of the laws' failure to "give an answer", i.e. to give prescriptions well adapted to particular cases, resides, therefore, in laying down a set of rules suited to the complexity of practical needs. The rules must be organized according to a precise logical structure based on the knowledge of causal connections. This logical structure preserves the authority of prescription. As is well known, for Aristotle there exists a hierarchical order between the various forms of practical knowledge as well as an architectonic practical science, i.e. politics. The priority of a practical science depends on the higher universality of the end for the sake of which it prescribes certain actions. The more universal the end for the sake of which a science gives its prescriptions, the higher its worth and authority. The more universal character of the architectonic science might be responsible for the ineffectiveness of its prescriptions, just as the law's universality is responsible for its distance from particular cases. The State's good, for example, is certainly a higher end than individual happiness, but it is harder to attain: the claim "the State's good is the most desirable end" does not say anything about all the specific conditions that must be satisfied in order to attain such a high end as the State's good. This case is similar to that of the criterion of the mean when one knows nothing about the nature of the mean in a certain domain of action. If the superiority of the end is to be distinct from the universality of the *nomos* which Aristotle criticises, then the various ends must, first of all, be hierarchically arranged. The "minor ends", or many of them, can thus become preliminary conditions for the attainment of the higher end. Secondly, this hierarchical order must have a logical basis, i.e. it has to be the outcome of a specific kind of reasoning, which arranges the various ends into a series of actions according to the order of priorities and the knowledge of causes. This kind of reasoning is deliberation. Consequently, the structure of a community well guided by laws and decrees, norms and rules, has to correspond to the logical structure of deliberation, which rests on a hypothetical procedure (if I want A, I have to do B ...) and presupposes the knowledge of causal connections (... because B is the efficient or material cause of A).

Thanks to the correspondence between the political structure and the logical structure of deliberation, the superiority of a practical end will be based on its greater universality as compared to minor and subordinate ends. The

ultimate end, however, will only be attained if some minor ends have been achieved which represent preliminary conditions for, or intermediate stages in, attaining it. As a result, the formulation of a particularly high practical end must be accompanied by a series of prescriptions for achieving intermediate objectives—just as in an individual deliberation we deliberate about what preliminary conditions are to be satisfied for us to achieve the object we want. Of course, there are also problems concerning particular prescriptions. The first is that circumstances are ever-changing. When a situation shifts, a prescription given in a previous state of affairs may turn out to be inadequate, whereas a generic norm has at least the advantage of comprising a wide range of solutions. Aristotle is well aware of this problem, which he tries to solve through his theory of deliberative reasoning.

What I have just sketched is the scope of my proposed research. I will now outline the historical context in which this research must be placed.

## 2 The Historical Background: the Debate on Prescription in the v and iv Centuries

The issue of rule-making as it emerges in some Aristotelian passages, can only from a very general point of view be connected with the tradition of didactic poetry inaugurated by Theognis of Megara, Phocylides of Miletus and Hesiod's *Works and Days*.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle develops his views on prescription within a more definite and chronologically closer historical context, i.e. the debate on political education, and particularly on the education of the ruling class, which took place from the mid-fifth to the late fourth century. This debate was triggered by the so-called σοφισταί, i.e. rhetoricians, teachers of political and domestic virtue and, in some cases, experts on legislation (such is the meaning of the word in several passages of Isocrates<sup>26</sup> and Plato<sup>27</sup> as well as in some pas-

25 On didactic poetry in archaic Greek age, cf. F. Montanari, *L'epica e la poesia didascalica*, in F. Montanari (ed.), *Da Omero agli Alessandrini. Problemi e figure della letteratura greca*, Nuova Italia Scientifica, Rome 1988, 13–82; A. Dihle, *A History of Greek Literature from Homer to the Hellenistic Period*, Routledge, London-New York 1994 (transl. from German edition, Beck's, Munich 1991), esp. 3–56; K.A. Raafaub, *Poets, Lawgivers, and the Beginnings of Political Reflection in Archaic Greece*, in C.J. Rowe-M. Schofield (eds. in association with S. Harrison-M. Lane), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, CUP, Cambridge 2000, 23–58; A.W. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs. Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self*, CUP, Cambridge 2016.

26 *Ad Demon.* 51, 5; *In soph.* 14, 5; *Hel.* 9, 5; *Paneg.* 3, 6; *Antid.* 203, 5; *Phil.* 12, 8.

27 *Ap. Socr.* 20a4; *Lach.* 186c3; *Protag.* 311e–312c; 314c1; 316c–317c; 349a2; *Hipp. Ma.* 281d5; 282b.

sages of Xenophon<sup>28</sup>). Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis are described as the champions of the new education,<sup>29</sup> capable of healing ignorance and teaching political science,<sup>30</sup> giving precepts (παράγγελλατα), particularly to rich young men,<sup>31</sup> as well as speaking to the assembly on issues of war and peace. Isocrates occasionally alludes to the constitutions written by these teachers of wisdom, and he also probably refers to the political speeches composed by Gorgias and Lysias.<sup>32</sup> Plato connects the art of the Sophists with legislative science (τέχνη νομοθετική).<sup>33</sup> Protagoras, as is well known, wrote the constitution of the Panhellenic colony of Thurii,<sup>34</sup> and authored a treatise entitled Προστακτικός.<sup>35</sup> Nothing is known about the content of this work. It is safe to assume, however, that it was a normative text, perhaps a handbook, where Protagoras dealt with the subject matter on which he considered himself an expert and a teacher, i.e. the art of managing one's household and taking part in public life.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, he can be credited with the introduction of the term προστακτικός, which will later take on a technical meaning and indicate political government and authority in general. In addition, Aristotle credits him with an analysis of the forms of speech where the command is described as the prescription or injunction to do or not to do something: τὸ γὰρ κελεῦσαι, φησὶν, ποιεῖν τι ἢ μὴ ἐπιτάξις ἐστίν.<sup>37</sup> It is doubtful whether Aristotle's words are a verbatim quotation. However, the use of ἐπιτάξις, another technical term connected with prescription, as well as the opposition ποιεῖν τι ἢ μὴ, which Aristotle will regard as the very logical structure of deliberative reasoning, are certainly significant.

All of this is closely linked with the "art of discourse", or rhetoric, of which fifth-century Sophists claimed to be masters. Rhetoric is the art of persuading and arguing for a thesis or for a practical choice, a rule of life. The art of discourse,<sup>38</sup> meant not only as an eristic, i.e. competitive, attitude, but also as the

28 *Cyneg.* 13, 1; 13, 9.

29 *Plat. Ap. Socr.* 19e.

30 *Plat. Protag.* 357e.

31 *Xenoph. Cyneg.* 13, 9.

32 Cf. *Isocr. Phil.* 12.

33 *Plat. Gorg.* 465c.

34 *Diog. Laert.* IX 50.

35 *Diog. Laert.* IX 55.

36 See *Plat. Protag.* 318e5–319a2: "That learning consists of good judgement in his (*scil.* young pupil's) own affairs, showing how best to order his own home; and in the affairs of his city, showing how he may have most influence on public affairs both in speech and in action". Transl. by W.R.M. Lamb, Harvard University Press, London 1967.

37 *Poet.* 1456b15–18.

38 The so-called "art of discourse" in the fifth and fourth centuries seems to have been a subject of contrasting judgements. The formula τέχνην περὶ λόγους is found in *Plat. Gorg.*

ability to argue for or against a thesis, is key to both the education of the young and prescription in general. The argument, *logos*, in favour of an action or a practical rule indicates both the end (“act so and so in order to ...”) and a good reason to choose one course of conduct and avoid the opposite one.<sup>39</sup>

The influence exerted by the Sophists sparked a reaction throughout the IV century as well as promoting interest in practical thinking and good practices. Isocrates and Xenophon provide valuable information for understanding Aristotle’s ideas on prescription.<sup>40</sup> Isocrates’ most significant works in this respect include *Ad Nicoclem* and *Nicocles*.<sup>41</sup> In the former, where he addresses the young *tyrannos* of Cyprus, Isocrates brings up the topic of the education of the prince by pointing out the lack of a prescriptive discipline for those who are destined to rule, whereas commoners have plenty of sources to learn rules of conduct from:

---

450c1–2 and used by Gorgias himself to define his art, in contrast to productive and manual arts. Isocrates, in *In soph.* 9–10, criticises the writers of political speeches (λόγοι πολιτικοί), who claimed to teach the art of discourse, according to a cliché of which we find ample evidence in Plato (*Euthyd.* 288a, *Protag.* 312d–e, 314b, and *Phaedr.* 266a–b). On the other hand, Socrates too, according to Xenophon, *Mem.* I 2, 31, is credited with having taught the “art of discourse”, i.e. the technique of dialogue through short questions and answers (cf. Plat. *Protag.* 328a–b; 334d–336b; *Gorg.* 449c; on ἑλεγχος cf. *Protag.* 344b, *Gorg.* 472c, and 475e), which was interdicted by Critias under the regime of the Thirty. On this topic, see E. Gunderson, “The Rhetoric of Rhetorical Theory”, in E. Gunderson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, CUP, Cambridge 2009, 109–125, and C.L. Johnstone, “Sophistical Wisdom. *Politikê Aretê* and *Logosophia*”, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 39 (2006), 265–289.

39 Cf. Plat. *Gorg.* 456b–c: the anecdote narrated by Gorgias about his own contribution in persuading his brother’s patients to follow medical prescriptions is aimed at proving that persuasion should be a preliminary step of prescription. What here appears a typically Gorgian argument, while evoking the concept of “the power of the word” (cf. 82 A11, *Helenaï Encomium*, 8, 12, 14), re-emerges in a renewed context in Plat. *Leg.* 720d–e and 857d–e. In these passages from *Laws*, Plato introduces the image of the free-born doctor who does not prescribe any treatment without having first persuaded the free-born sick through *logos* and dialogue (cf. 857d1).

40 The possible impact of Isocrates’ ideas on Aristotle and the Peripatos has been widely studied. Among the most recent contributions, see D. Depew, “The Inscription of Isocrates into Aristotle’s Practical Philosophy”, in T. Poulakos-D. Depew (eds.), *Isocrates and Civic Education*, Univ. of Texas Press, Austin 2004, 157–185; E.V.C. Haskins, “Choosing between Isocrates and Aristotle. Disciplinary Assumptions and Pedagogical Implications”, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 36 (2006), 191–201, this latter focussed on the statute of rhetoric; W.W. Fortenbaugh, “Parainesis. Isocrates and Theophrastus”, *Hyperboreus*, 15 (2009), 251–262; T. Wareh, *The Theory and Practice of Life. Isocrates and the Philosophers*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2012, part. 14–54.

41 On these texts see J.H. Collins, *Exhortations to Philosophy. The Protreptics of Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle*, OUP, Oxford-New York 2015, esp. 196–227.

For my part, I should think that this would be the finest and the most serviceable present and the most suitable for me to give and for you to receive. I could prescribe what pursuits you should aspire to (ὀρεγόμενος) and from what you should abstain (ἀπεχόμενος) in order to govern to the best advantage your state and kingdom. For when men are in private life, many things contribute to their education: first and foremost, the absence of luxury among them, and the necessity they are under to take thought each day for their livelihood; next, the laws by which in each case their civic life is governed; furthermore, freedom of speech and the privilege which is openly granted to friends to rebuke and to enemies to attack each other's faults; besides, a number of the poets of earlier times have left precepts which direct them how to live; so that, from all these influences, they may reasonably be expected to become better men. Kings, however, have no such help; on the contrary, they, who more than other men should be thoroughly trained, live all their lives, from the time when they are placed in authority, without admonition ...<sup>42</sup>

The main issue raised in this passage is the lack of a prescriptive discipline for τύραννοι, who are not subject to such rules as constrain commoners. There are various reasons for this. More often than not, commoners are poor, hence they escape the danger of luxury which threatens the young prince; unlike kings, commoners are subject to laws guiding their actions; they can be content with the moral precepts (ὑποθήκαι) provided by the poets, and they can ask their family and friends for advice, since they enjoy mutual freedom of speech, whereas a prince cannot be certain of the sincerity of his courtiers. Isocrates' views, here at least, seem to be rather conventional and reveal no in-depth thinking on prescriptive ethics. Nevertheless it is interesting to note how Isocrates describes the effect he expects his teachings to achieve, i.e. an *inclination* towards the prescribed actions and a *rejection* of the forbidden ones. Prescription, then, has the form of a polar opposition; its psychological character is alluded to by the verb ὀρέγεσθαι, which suggests that its content must not only be put into practice but also, in a sense, desired, after its truth and worth have been understood.

Isocrates' short work is not a handbook for princes, although it does include specific precepts about the most appropriate attitude to different circumstances.<sup>43</sup> Rather, it emphasizes two other general aspects of prescription, to

42 *Ad Nicocl.* 2–4. Translations of Isocrates are taken from G. Norlin, Harvard Univ. Press–Heinemann, Cambridge, MA—London 1980.

43 Cf. *Ad Nicocl.* 18–42. On the place taken by *Ad Nicocles* and *Nicocles* in the educational

which, as we shall see, Plato and Aristotle refer abundantly. The first aspect concerns education and the care for the soul, the second is the view that good prescriptive discipline and training should also teach one to deliberate and decide appropriately on the major questions:

I have dwelt on these matters because I think that you, who are not one of the multitude but a king over the multitude, ought not to be of the same mind as men at large; you ought not to judge what things are worthy or what men are wise by the standard of pleasure, but to appraise them in the light of conduct that is useful; especially, since the teachers of philosophy, however much they debate about the proper discipline of the soul—some contending that it is through disputation, others that it is through political discussion, others that it is through other means that their disciples are to attain to greater wisdom—, yet are all agreed on this, that the well-educated man must, as the result of this training in whatever discipline, show ability to deliberate and decide (βουλευέσθαι).<sup>44</sup>

Isocrates refers to prescriptive ethics in other works too, e.g. in his *Nicocles*, which has the form of a speech given by the prince himself. This formal aspect is interesting from the perspective of Isocrates' view of political prescription, and establishes a close link between *Nicocles* and the end of *Ad Nicoclem*. The latter is conceived as a speech of the master to a special pupil, the future king, who needs not just rules of practical conduct, but a kind of wisdom enabling him to deliberate (βουλευέσθαι) and hence prescribe rules of conduct to his subjects. *Nicocles*, on the other hand, is a protreptic speech addressed by the king to his subjects:

On the former topic, how a ruler should act, you have heard Isocrates speak; on the following topic, what his subjects must do, I shall attempt to discourse, not with any thought of excelling him, but because this is the most fitting subject for me to discuss with you. For if I did not make

---

program of Isocrates, see C.J. Classen, *Herrscher, Bürger und Erzieher. Beobachtungen zu den Reden des Isokrates*, Olms, Hildesheim 2010, esp. ch. III.

44 *Ad Nicocl.* 50–51. In *Nicocl.* 9 Isocrates introduces his conception of hegemonic *logos*, according to which “in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom”. What is most interesting in the context of *Nicocles*, 7–9, is the role played by the deliberative capacity made possible by *logos*. On Isocrates' conception of hegemonic *logos*, as compared to Gorgias' idea of *dynastes logos*, see J. Poulakos, “Rhetoric and Civic Education: From the Sophists to Isocrates”, in T. Poulakos-D. Depew (eds.), *Isocrates and Civic Education*, cit., 69–83.

clear what I desire you to do, I could not reasonably be angry with you if you were to mistake my purpose; but if, after I have announced my policy beforehand (προειπόντος), none of my desires are carried out, then I should justly blame those who fail to obey me. And I believe that I should most effectively exhort you and urge you to remember my words and heed them, not if I should confine myself to giving you advice and then, after counting out my precepts, make an end (ἀπαλλαγείην), but if, before doing this, I should prove to you (προεπιδείξαιμι), first, that you ought to be content with our present government, not only from necessity, nor because we have lived under it all our lives, but because it is the best of all governments; and, second, that I hold this office, not illegally nor as a usurper, but with the just sanction of gods and men, and by virtue of my earliest ancestors, and of my father and of myself. For, once these claims have been established (τούτων γὰρ προαποδειχθέντων), who will not condemn himself to the severest punishment if he fails to heed my counsels and commands?<sup>45</sup>

The prescription of other people's conduct is here described as legislation and political authority exercised over the ἀρχόμενοι. This authority, as Nicocles has it, draws its legitimacy from a discourse that has not only to accompany, but also to *precede* the promulgation of laws and prescriptions (see the use of the three verbs προλέγω, προεπιδείκνυμι, and προαποδείκνυμι, the last in passive form<sup>46</sup>). Such a discourse consists in the demonstration that authority, embodied by the prince, must be obeyed because it represents the best political regime and therefore the common good. It is crucial that this discourse should *precede* prescription proper, i.e. the promulgation of laws and punishments, in order that the subjects become aware that the breach of the law harms the state and the political community. We may say that the preliminary discourse containing the reason for prescription and authority at the same time indicates the end for the sake of which the prince exerts his authority and issues his prescription. The end has to gain the consent of the subjects and somehow become a

45 *Nicocl.* 11–13.

46 As for the second and the third verb, *LSJ* gives respectively “explain before”, or “display before”, and “prove before”, or “demonstrate before”, the latter attested also in technical contexts such as Philod. *De signis*, x11 5 and Ptol. *Tetr.* 50. The most correct interpretation of προλέγω, instead, seems to be “state publicly”, “proclaim”, accordingly to the meaning of this verb in legal contexts, cf. Thuc. 1 139: προὔλεγον τὸ ψήφισμα ..., and Lycurg. 4: ὁ νόμος πέφυκε προλέγειν ἃ μὴ δεῖ πράττειν; προ- is intended as a local prefix, not a temporal one. The sense, however, is not too distant from the idea of “say before”, for what is codified and legally established is somehow pre-announced.

“desired” object. This view is reminiscent of Plato’s talk of proems to the laws, with which we shall deal shortly. The analogy between Isocrates’ preamble and the proems in Plato’s *Laws* is borne out by Isocrates’ remark that, without the preamble legitimating his authority, Nicocles would just give orders and then “go away” (ἀπαλλαγεῖν). This image is reminiscent of the slave-physician in the *Laws*, 720c7, who administers a treatment without explaining what he is doing and immediately abandoning (ἀποπηδήσας) the slave-patient; it recalls as well the architect in *Statesman*, 260a5, who is not allowed to form a plan and then “go away” (ἀπηλλάχθαι), but has to give orders for his plan to be realized. Finally, the image recalls also the lawgiver in *Laws* 822d6, who must not legislate and then “go away”, but see to it that his orders are carried out. In the last two cases, Plato refers to an operation which is not preliminary to prescription, but subsequent to it. Yet the fact that the image of an authority “going away” turns up over and over again can be viewed as the sign of an ongoing debate about the notion of authority and the relationship between prescription and persuasion.

Isocrates returns to the topic of the education of the prince and the exercise of authority in his *Letter to Alexander*, where he describes Alexander as taking a distinct interest in a kind of practical reasoning that has some similar features to Aristotle’s theory of deliberation:

This branch of learning (*scil.* eristics), I am told, you are not content with, but you choose rather the training on reasonings which is of use in the practical affairs of everyday life and aids us when we deliberate (βουλευόμεθα) concerning public affairs. By means of this study you will come to know how at the present time to form reasonably sound opinions about the future, how not ineptly to prescribe (προστάττειν) your subject peoples what each should do, how to form correct judgements (ὀρθῶς κρίνειν) about the right and the just and their opposites and, besides, to reward and chastise each class as it deserves.<sup>47</sup>

Apparently, Alexander trained in deliberative reasoning rather than “eloquence”, i.e. the kind of practical reasoning enabling him to *deliberate* about future things, *give prescriptions* to his subjects and *judge* them. In other words, according to the short portrait painted by Isocrates, Alexander embodies the three powers Aristotle describes in his *Politics*,<sup>48</sup> i.e. deliberating, judging, prescribing (βουλευσασθαι ... καὶ κρίναι καὶ ἐπιτάξαι).

47 *Ad Alex.* 4.

48 1299a26–27.



Xenophon too addresses the subject of prescription in various manners, drawing on Socrates' teaching, fifth-century rhetorical and political culture, and traditional ethics. The views expressed in *Mem.* 1 2, 19–20 and 1 3, 1, for example, are rooted in traditional ethics. In the first passage, Xenophon uses Socrates' biography to show that those who do not exercise their soul are unable to do what they ought to do and refrain from doing what ought not to do (οὐτε ἂν δεῖ πράττειν ... οὔτε ὧν δεῖ ἀπέχεσθαι). In the second passage, Socrates is characterized as relying on traditional prescriptions and the Delphic oracle in order to know how to behave (πῶς δεῖ ποιεῖν) towards the gods or his family.<sup>49</sup> In both contexts, Xenophon seems to be above all committed to describing Socrates as respectful of traditional morals and precepts.<sup>50</sup> The analysis of the prescriptive nature of the law makes for a different and far more interesting case. In *Mem.* 1 2, 42 ff., Xenophon has Pericles and Alcibiades discussing the definition of *nomos*. Pericles claims that the law is a decision approved by the majority of citizens about what ought and ought not to be done, encouraging good behaviour and punishing bad:

Well, Alcibiades, there is no great difficulty about what you desire. You wish to know what a law is. Laws are all the rules approved and enacted by the majority in assembly, whereby they declare what ought and what ought not to be done (ἅ τε δεῖ ποιεῖν καὶ ἂ μὴ).<sup>51</sup>

49 "In order to support my opinion that he benefited his companions, alike by actions that revealed his own character and by his conversation, I will set down what I recollect of these. First, then, for his attitude towards religion; his deeds and words were clearly in harmony with the answer given by the Priestess at Delphi to such questions as 'What is my duty (πῶς δεῖ ποιεῖν) about sacrifice?' or about 'cult of ancestors.' For the answer of the Priestess is, 'Follow the custom of the State: that is the way to act piously.' And so Socrates acted himself and counselled others to act. To take any other course he considered presumption and folly". Translations of Xenophon are by E.C. Marchant-O.J. Todd, revised by J. Henderson, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2013.

50 As is well known, it has long been maintained that Xenophon's portrait of Socrates is a conformist representation, introducing Socrates as very respectful of both laws and civic gods. This belief, generally accompanied with an underestimation of Xenophon's evidence about Socrates, has been widely criticised and the issue remains matter of debate. Among the most recent and balanced studies, see especially T. Calvo Martínez, "La religiosité de Socrate chez Xénophon", in M. Narcy-A. Tordesillas (eds.), *Xénophon et Socrate. Actes du Colloque d'Aix-en-Provence (6–9 novembre 2005)*, Vrin, Paris 2008, 49–64; C. Horn, "Socrates on Political Thought. The Testimonies of Plato and Xenophon", *Elenchos*, 29 (2008), 279–302; V.J. Gray, "Xenophon's Socrates and Democracy", *Polis*, 28 (2011), 1–32; O. Chernyakhovskaya, *Sokrates bei Xenophon. Moral-Politik-Religion*, Narr, Tübingen 2014, esp. 196–213.

51 *Mem.* 1 2, 42, 1–5.

Pericles' definition prompts Alcibiades to raise one first problem: it would seem that the law must be obeyed just because it is issued by an authority, even if it is the authority of oligarchs or of a tyrant:

But if, as happens under an oligarchy, not the majority, but a minority meet and enact rules of conduct, what are these?—Whatsoever the sovereign power in the State, after deliberation, enacts and directs to be done is known as a law.—If, then, a despot, being the sovereign power, enacts what the citizens are to do, are his orders also a law?—Yes, whatever a despot as ruler enacts is also known as a law.<sup>52</sup>

This means, as Alcibiades points out, that the law is sovereign regardless of its practical content, i.e. it is sovereign even when it prescribes a violent or illegal action (βία καὶ ἀνομία), as is most notably the case with a tyrannical regime.<sup>53</sup> According to Pericles' definition of the law (which Alcibiades' objections will eventually force him to withdraw), good and bad actions are apparently good or bad because they are prescribed or forbidden by a law issued by the appropriate deliberating body, whereas the reverse would make more sense: those actions should be regulated by the law which are unanimously regarded as good or bad. Interestingly, in this passage law-making is repeatedly referred to by the verb γράφειν. This is a common usage when talking about the promulgation of a law,<sup>54</sup> but it is also suggestive of Plato's discussion of written laws. Plato regards the written form as a prescriptive limit of the law, whereas in Pericles' description of the law the verb γράφειν enables Alcibiades to show that the prescriptive force of the law rests on the authority of the legislating political body. If this is so, the norms and prescriptions that oligarchs and tyrants "write down" turn out to have the same authority as the laws issued by a democratic assem-

52 *Mem.* I, 2, 43, 1–7.

53 *Mem.* I 2, 44, 1–45, 6: "But force, the negation of law, what is that, Pericles? Is it not the action of the stronger when he constrains the weaker to do whatever he chooses, not by persuasion, but by force (μὴ πείσαντες, ἀλλὰ κρατοῦντες)?" "That is my opinion." "Then whatever a despot by enactment constrains the citizens to do without persuasion, is the negation of law?" "I think so: and I withdraw my answer that whatever a despot enacts without persuasion is a law." "And when the minority passes enactments, not by persuading the majority, but through using its power, are we to call that force or not?" "Everything, I think, that men constrain others to do 'without persuasion,' whether by enactment or not, is not law, but force." "It follows then, that whatever the assembled majority, through using its power over the owners of property, enacts without persuasion is not law, but force?"

54 Cf., for instance, Eurip. *Iphig. in Taur.* 585, Xenoph. *Mem.* I 2, 31 cit., *Hell.* II 3, 1; II 3, II, 3–4; Andoc. *De myster.* 82, 84, 85; Dio Chrys. 21, 3 (about Critias), Diog. Laert. IX 50.

bly. The example of a government imposing laws through coercion rather than persuasion leads Pericles to correct his definition. What is interesting for us here is the view that the law draws its authority from being *written*, i.e. sanctioned by any deliberating body whatsoever, not from its moral content or the approval of non-deliberating citizens. What is here suggested, albeit implicitly, is that a prescriptive act, most notably a political and legislative one, should be accompanied by a discourse explaining its aim and thereby persuading those for whom the prescription has been issued that by observing it they contribute to the common good.

Some of the topics discussed by Pericles and Alcibiades are taken up again in the dialogue between Socrates and the sophist Hippias in the IV book of the *Memorabilia*.<sup>55</sup> At first, Hippias proposes a definition of the laws as norms that the citizens have written down after agreeing on what ought and ought not to be done (ἃ οἱ πολῖται, ἔφη, συνθέμενοι ἃ τε δεῖ ποιεῖν καὶ ὧν ἀπέχεσθαι ἐγράψαντο). However, he disputes Socrates' purported view that what is in compliance with the law is right:

Laws ... can hardly be thought of much account, Socrates, or observance of them, seeing that the very men who passed them often reject and amend them.<sup>56</sup>

There is a difference here from both Pericles' and Alcibiades' dialogue, in *Mem.* I 2, 42 ff., and Plato's criticism of written laws. The problem with the law is neither that its prescriptive value rests only on the sovereignty of the deliberating body (according to Alcibiades' remark in *Mem.* I 2, 44); nor that, fixed once and for all, it fails to include all particular cases and take into account shifts in circumstances (as Plato has it). The problem with the law is rather that, despite being written and hence apparently steady and constant, all too often it is changed by the very deliberating bodies that wrote it down. Hippias's view is certainly different from both Plato's and the one Xenophon describes Alcibiades as holding. All these discussions of the law can nonetheless be regarded as connected to the following single idea: before writing down the law and, generally speaking, before prescribing a rule of conduct, one has to successfully identify the good end for the sake of which certain actions will be prescribed or forbidden. The good end must be determined before anything is prescribed; in addition, it must be the object of a persuasive discourse, which is *prelim-*

55 On the dialogue between Pericles and Alcibiades and that between Socrates and Hippias, see O. Chernyakhovskaya, op. cit., 200–212.

56 *Mem.* IV 4, 14.

inary to prescription. This allows prescription, or law, to be an instrument of persuasion, not coercion, and turns the good end into a uniform and constant criterion—provided it is determined in a correct way and approved by the widest possible majority. For it may be necessary to change a law or replace old rules with new ones. Yet this change will not be, as Hippias apparently fears, a dangerous shift and a threat to authority, but a fresh deliberation with a view to the same good end.

Xenophon provides further useful information for reconstructing the background to Aristotle's discussion of deliberation and prescription. In *Mem.* III 3, 9, for example, he has Socrates develop the argument of practical competence: when we want to achieve a result, we turn to someone who has the appropriate competence and appears to know better than other people “what is to be done” (ὅς ἂν μάλιστα εἰδῶς φαίνεται ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν) in the relevant domain of action. As we shall see in the following chapters, Aristotle devotes an in-depth discussion to competence, and regards possession of the rules of the art as a crucial component of his idea of prescription and his theory of the architectonic order of practical sciences. It is in chapter 6 of the IV book, however, in the dialogue between Socrates and Euthydemus, that Xenophon hints at his own concept of prescription. To illustrate that Socrates trained his pupils in dialectic by questioning them about the definitions of virtues, Xenophon imagines a conversation between Socrates and Euthydemus centred on the definitions of piety and justice. Euthydemus points out that there are *nomoi* regulating our relationship with both the gods and our fellow humans. These laws are prescriptions with a twofold aim: first, they lay down a duty or a line of conduct; second, they prescribe the correct way to carry out what they impose. Let us look at the bit of the dialogue concerning piety:

May a man worship the gods according to his own will and pleasure—No, there are laws (νόμοι) to be observed in worshipping the gods!—Then will not he who knows these laws know how he must (ὥς δεῖ) worship the gods?—I think so.—Then does he who knows how he must worship the gods think that he must do so according to his knowledge, and not otherwise?—He does indeed.—And does everyone worship the gods as he thinks he ought (ὥς οἴεται δεῖν), and not otherwise?—I think so.—Then will he who knows what is lawful about the gods worship the gods lawfully?—Certainly.—Then does not he who worships lawfully worship as he ought?—Of course.—Yes, but he who worships as he ought is pious?—Certainly.<sup>57</sup>

57 *Mem.* IV 6, 2–4.

That *nomos* be regarded as the guide of actions, in accord with good and evil, is a similar view to that expressed at the end of the dialogue between Pericles and Alcibiades. A good course of conduct is not the one prescribed by an authority-wielding body; rather, it is the law that has prescriptive authority because it is formulated with a view to the good. Worship of the gods and social respect are the attitudes that, by nearly general consent, enable one to achieve the common good; consequently, they are both a matter for legislation. There is something more, however, to this *Memorabilia* passage than what we found in the conversation between Pericles and Alcibiades. The law prescribes a certain conduct, say worship of the gods or social respect; but it also indicates *how* worship of the gods and justice are to be exercised. Knowing the laws about worship of the gods or justice does not only mean knowing that we must in some way honour the gods and respect human beings, but includes knowing some specific practices and the limits within which they are to be applied. We can assume, therefore, that Xenophon interpreted Socrates' theory that virtue is knowledge as referring to the knowledge of *what* ought to be done and *how* it ought to be done (i.e. within what limits set by the law). This view turns up again in the *Oeconomicus*.<sup>58</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the most crucial background to Aristotle's concept of prescription remains Plato's discussion of it. We will now consider two passages, one from the *Statesman* and one from the *Laws*. In *Pol.* 304a–305e, Plato outlines the tasks of political science with regard to its auxiliary sciences and draws a distinction between prescriptive and auxiliary sciences that Aristotle will take over to a significant extent. Political science prescribes what the people possessing arts and technical competencies such as strategy, judicial activity

---

58 In *Oec.* 15, 2–3 Socrates asks Ischomachus: “You said, you know, that the greatest lesson to learn is how things ought to be done; and added that, if a man is ignorant what to do and how to do it (ἂ δέῃ καὶ ὥς δέῃ ποιεῖν), no good can come of his management”. In the following lines, *Oec.* 15, 6–7, Socrates adds an important remark about the knowledge of what is to be done and how it is to be done, in order to have an effective competence: “... you said that one who is to be successful in the management of a farm must learn what to do and *how* and *when* to do it. That is the subject that we have treated, it seems to me, in a rather cursory fashion as if you said that anyone who is to be capable of writing from dictation and reading what is written must know the alphabet. For had I been told that, I should have been told, to be sure, that I must know the alphabet, but I don't think that piece of information would help me to know it”. This observation implies the idea that a general practical norm may be defective in prescribing particular acts to achieve a particular end. Socrates' remark concludes, in ch. 9, with the analogy of the doctor, which recalls similar comparisons employed by Aristotle himself, cf. *Eth. nic.* 1138b30 ff.: “Were I to decide this very moment to be a farmer, I think I should be like that doctor who goes round visiting the sick, but has no knowledge of the right way to treat them”.

and rhetoric, ought and ought not to do.<sup>59</sup> These competencies serve political science and are its auxiliaries. What distinguishes a prescriptive from an auxiliary science is the fact that e.g. strategy knows *how* (ὥς) to fight a people we *chose* (προελώμεθα) to fight, whereas political science is the ability to deliberate (διαβουλεύσασθαι) *whether* (εἴτε) we have to wage war or pursue peace.<sup>60</sup> The language that Plato uses to describe the different tasks of strategy, an auxiliary science, and politics, an authoritative and hegemonic science, is reminiscent of a series of topics to which Aristotle will devote an in-depth discussion. I will mention them briefly here: the relationship between deliberative reasoning, which answers the question *how?* and offers a solution to a practical problem, and the act of choosing (προαίρεῖσθαι) a line of conduct; the view that prescription is therefore analogous to choice; finally, the idea that the object of deliberation has to take on the form of hypothetical reasoning comprising two opposed theses (cf. *Pol.* 304e9: εἴτε πολεμητέον εἴτε διὰ φιλίας ἀπαλλακτέον). Judicial activity is auxiliary to politics in that it judges the relationships among citizens in compliance with the norms issued by the lawgiver, and assumes the laws and norms as a standard to judge (κρίνειν) whether what is done, is justly done. Consequently, the authority of the judges is not that of lawgivers, but of custodians of the laws issued by someone else, i.e. the royal man:

If then one looks at all the sorts of expert knowledge that have been discussed, it must be observed that none of them has been declared to be statesmanship. For what is really kingship must not itself perform practical tasks, but control those with the capacity to perform them, because it knows when it is the right time to begin and set in motion the most important things in cities, and when it is the wrong time; and the others must do what has been prescribed (τὰ προσταχθέντα δρᾶν) for them.<sup>61</sup>

The *Laws* passage relevant to our reconstruction of Aristotle's background is 719e–724b, i.e. the celebrated description of the function of preambles to laws. This passage will help us understand the significance of the concept of end within Aristotle's theory of deliberation. As we have seen above, in his *Nico-*

59 Plat. *Pol.* 304a1–2.

60 *Pol.* 304e5–11.

61 *Pol.* 305c9–d4. Transl. by C.J. Rowe, *Plato. Statesman*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis-Cambridge (MA) 1999. See also C.J. Rowe, "The *Politicus* and Other Dialogues", in C.J. Rowe-M. Schofield (eds., in association with S. Harrison-M. Lane), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, cit., 233–256, esp. 244–251 on the topic of the superiority of wise ruler over the written law.

cles Isocrates hints at the view that political authority should be *preceded* by an explanation of why it is good, in order that the subjects obey authority not because they are forced to, but because they are convinced of its usefulness for the common good. Preambles to laws play a key role in Plato's discussion of prescription, as they prove the lawgiver's ability to account for his injunctions.<sup>62</sup> The issue is raised through a medical analogy. Medicine can be exercised in two ways, according to whether the doctor is a freeman or a slave. In the former case, the doctor will persuade the patient that the treatment is necessary before administering it. In the latter, the doctor will give the patient no account of the therapy he administers, for he passes on an order he has in turn received.<sup>63</sup> The analogy between twofold legislation (i.e. the law preceded by a preamble and the law lacking a preamble) and twofold medicine is pervaded by terms referring to prescription and practical reasoning:

These (*scil.* the inferior order of doctors) ... acquire their art under the direction of their masters (κατ' ἐπίταξιν δὲ τῶν δεσποτῶν), by observation and practice and not by the study of nature—which is the way in which the free-born doctors have learnt the art themselves and in which they instruct their own disciples ... not one of these doctors either gives or receives any account (λόγον) of the several ailments of the various domestics, but prescribes (προστάξας) for each what he deems right from experience, just as though he had exact knowledge (ὡς ἀκριβῶς εἰδῶς), and with the assurance of an autocrat (καθάπερ τύραννος αὐθαδῶς); then up he jumps and off he rushes to another sick domestic ... But the free-born doctor ... talks with the patient himself ... learns himself from the sufferers and imparts instruction to them, so far as possible; and he gives no prescription (ἐπέταξεν) until he has gained the patient's consent ...<sup>64</sup>

62 Cf. A. Laks, "The Laws", in C.J. Rowe-M. Schofield (eds., in association with S. Harrison-M. Lane), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, cit., 258–291, esp. 285–290, on preambles. According to Laks, preambles have generally (and paradigmatically) the function of providing normative statements that are not laws in strict sense (that, is, do not have coercitive strength). The variety in kind and form of preambles reflects the variety of characters and natures of the "citizens of the second city". See also J. Annas, "Virtue and Law in Plato", in C. Bobonich (ed.), *Plato's Laws. A Critical Guide*, CUP, Cambridge 2010, 71–91; H.J. Fossheim, "The prooimia, Types of Motivation, and Moral Psychology", in C. Horn (ed.), *Platon. Gesetzte—Nomoi*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2013, 87–104.

63 *Leg.* 720b2 ff.

64 *Leg.* 720b2–d7. Translation by R.G. Bury, *Plato. Laws*, vol. I, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1926, repr. 1968.

The preamble, therefore, reveals the end of the law, just as the free-born doctor before starting a treatment gives the patient an account of the relationship between the treatment and the recovery that is the end of both the doctor and the patient. In addition, since the preamble reveals the end of the law and, so doing, shows that the law is good, it helps to originate a desire for what can be achieved by obeying the law. The notion of desire appears when the State's first law, i.e. the one concerning marriage and the constitution of a family, is introduced. The age at marriage is strictly regulated by laws (between thirty and thirty-five<sup>65</sup>), but it is also justified and accounted for by the natural desire of all human beings to become somehow immortal through their children.<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, obedience to a particular law is here described as a way to realize a desire (i.e. immortality through one's own children) not of the lawgiver but of those who must obey the law. Prescription is the outcome of a deliberation whose starting point coincides with the good of those who are given the prescription.

To conclude my summary account of the historical background to Aristotle's concept of prescription, I will briefly discuss an interesting passage of the orator Lycurgus, a contemporary of Aristotle's and for some time a student in Plato's Academy.<sup>67</sup> In his speech *Against Leocrates*, composed around 330, he says:

I want also to recommend Homer to you. In your fathers' eyes he was a poet of such worth that they passed a law that every four years at the Panathenaea he alone of all the poets should have his works recited; and thus they showed the Greeks their admiration for the noblest deeds. They were right to do so. Laws are too brief to give instruction: they merely prescribe the things that must be done (οἱ μὲν γὰρ νόμοι διὰ τὴν συντομίαν οὐ διδάσκουσιν, ἀλλ' ἐπιτάττουσιν ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν); but poets, depicting life itself,

65 *Leg.* 721b1–2.

66 721b4–c2: “The double form shall be this,—‘A man shall marry when he is thirty years old and under thirty-five, bearing in mind (διανοηθέντα) that this is the way by which the human race, by nature's ordinance, shares in immortality, a thing for which nature has implanted in everyone a keen desire (ἐπιθυμίαν). The desire to win glory, instead of lying in a nameless grave, aims at a like object’”. This is the “double” form of the law, διπλούς, that is, the formulation of the law including its preamble and end. The simple form, ἀπλούς, is limited to the following prescription: “A man shall marry when he is thirty years old and under five and thirty; if he fails to do so, he shall be punished ...”.

67 On Lycurgus' allegiance to Plato, cf. R.F. Renehan, “The Platonism of Lycurgus”, *Greek Roman Byzantine Studies*, 11 (1970) 219–231; D. Allen, “Changing the Authoritative Voice: Lycurgus' *Against Leocrates*”, *Classical Antiquity*, 19 (2000) 5–33.



select the noblest actions and so through argument and demonstration (μετὰ λόγου καὶ ἀποδείξεως) convert men's hearts.<sup>68</sup>

Lycurgus claims that poets are better educators than laws, for laws give prescriptions but fail to teach virtue because of their brevity. The view that the problem with laws is their brevity recalls Plato's talk in the *Laws* of a twofold legislation: the law that, as Lycurgus has it, for the sake of brevity prescribes what ought to be done without teaching virtue, is reminiscent of the law without a preamble or the treatment of a slave doctor not accounting for what he is doing. Lycurgus argues that brevity prevents the law from explaining why a certain conduct is praiseworthy while another is blameworthy. This is the task of poetry: an imitation of life, poetry offers examples of what happens or may happen in real life, thereby providing a real moral teaching. Literary fiction, therefore, suggests rules of life, as well as giving what the law cannot give, i.e. an argument and a proof in favour of virtue. The law's συντομία is also reminiscent of another critical aspect that Plato discusses in the *Statesman* and Aristotle takes over from him. The fact that the problem with the law is its "brevity" means not only that it orders or forbids something without stating the reasons why it does so, but that it orders or forbids certain actions without considering the character of people and the circumstances of life of which poetry provides such a vivid description. Literary fiction prompts us to recognize ourselves in the stories it tells and draw from them an example to follow or avoid for the reasons explained by the author. The law, by contrast, seems unable to take account of the real circumstances under which an order or a prohibition is to be observed.

### 3 Aristotle's Criticism of Socrates

Socrates too plays an important role in the background to Aristotle's discussion of prescription. In what is presumably Aristotle's chief source on the thinking of the historical Socrates, i.e. Plato's early dialogues, Socrates is described as talking with the teachers of rhetoric and political virtue and arguing for an original view of moral education. Yet his main contribution to the debate on prescription can be found most notably in Plato's *Apology*, where he defines his task as an educator. First of all, he has engaged in wide-ranging criticism of

68 *Adv. Leocr.* 102. Transl. by J.O. Burt, *Lycurg. Minor Attic Orators*, vol. II, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1962.

the alleged wisdom of politicians (21c–d), poets (22b–c), and craftsmen (χειροτέχναί, 22c–d) and has found out that all these people did not know anything about the most important and difficult issues (τὰ μέγιστα) they claimed to know about. Socrates maintains that the most important thing is the care for one's soul and knowledge of oneself. While defending himself from the accusation of corrupting the young, he claims that what he sought throughout his life is the way to make people better (βελτίους ποιεῖν), starting from the young (24d–e); and to make people better, laws and judges are not sufficient: what is needed is constant care for one's soul. Socrates goes on to say that he has devoted his entire life to philosophy and that he will never cease to exhort his fellow Athenians (29d4–5, οὐ μὴ παύσωμαι φιλοσοφῶν καὶ ὑμῖν παρακελευόμενος), whom he accuses of pursuing worthless things, neglecting real goods (29e–30a1) and failing to understand that the care for one's soul is more important than both private and public affairs. The care for one's soul, then, is Socrates' most significant prescription:

Then he who enjoins a knowledge of oneself bids us become acquainted with the soul.<sup>69</sup>

It is no easy task, however, to explain just what the care for one's soul and the best conduct are for Socrates. Plato's Socrates strongly argues that it is necessary for us to know ourselves,<sup>70</sup> and equates virtue with wisdom,<sup>71</sup> φρόνησις, and knowledge of goods and evils,<sup>72</sup> ἐπιστήμη τῶν ἀγαθῶν τε καὶ κακῶν. The definition of virtue as the science of goods and evils is perfectly consistent with the claim that moral virtue is unitary and teachable, διδασκτόν,<sup>73</sup> and that action is good precisely because it is accompanied by intelligence, i.e. reasoning. For intelligence is action's guide and the science of goods and evils is the

69 *Alc. I* 130e8: Ψυχὴν ἄρα ἡμᾶς κελεύει γνωρίσαι ὁ ἐπιτάττων γινῶναι ἑαυτόν. Transl. by W.R.M. Lamb, cit.

70 Cf. *Protag.* 343b; *Charm.* 156e; 164d–165a; *Euthyd.* 275a.

71 Cf. *Men.* 88c; 89c.

72 *Protag.* 330b; 361a–b; *Men.* 87c–d; *Lach.* 199b–c; *Euthyd.* 292d. Cf. *Resp.* 438e.

73 The theme of the teachability of virtue is largely treated in Plato's dialogues, and is a peculiar character of Socrates' *elenchos*. Cf. *Euthyd.* 282c; *Protag.* 319a–b; 320b–c; 324c (these passages refer to the question whether political virtue is teachable, as initially claimed by Protagoras); 361a–b; *Men.* 70a; 86d; 95b, etc. Cf., also, in a more problematic way, ps. *Plat. Clitoph.* 408b7. On the close relationship between the definition of virtue, its unity, its teachability, and the formal structure of Socrates' questioning, centered on τί ἐστίν question, see now V. Politis, *The Structure of Enquiry in Plato's Early Dialogues*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, esp. 110–128 on *Euthydemus* and *Meno*, and *passim*.

ability to understand how to use things in an intelligent way. This science, as Plato's Socrates has it, can only be taught by constant dialogue. In Plato's dialogues Socrates is often described as a man who loves διατρίβειν ἐν τῇ ζητήσῃ and φιλοσοφεῖν, without any interest in public affairs and without bothering to teach his young friends how to achieve success in life.<sup>74</sup> He appeared, both to opponents and adherents, devoid of practical sense and prescriptive ability. Socrates' teaching is completely out of touch with practical life, hence with political activity, from which he apparently wants to turn away the brightest young men. The way Alcibiades describes Socrates's teaching in the *Symposium* is surely a tribute to his master's moral superiority, but it also testifies to his regret, as it were, for the lack of precise prescriptive content:

For he forces me to admit that although there's much that I lack myself, it's myself I neglect, and do the Athenians' business. So I forcibly stop my ears and I'm off, as if I were running away from the Sirens, to prevent my sitting there and growing old beside him. He's the only person in the world towards whom I have experienced what one wouldn't suppose I had in me—feeling ashamed towards someone, no matter who; it's only towards him that I feel it. For I'm conscious that I'm not capable of arguing against doing what he tells me to do (ὥς οὐ δεῖ ποιεῖν ἃ οὗτος κελεύει) ...<sup>75</sup>

Alcibiades admits that he has been influenced by Socrates and has always been unable to counter Socrates' urge to care for his soul rather than the Athenians' affairs. Although he is clearly fascinated by his master, Alcibiades cannot refrain from taking part in public life as soon as he is out of Socrates' influence. His "betrayal" is surely caused by his own ambition; yet it is also the consequence of Socrates' failure to prescribe him a precise rule of conduct. This shows that Socrates, turning Alcibiades away from public life while he was with him, exerted not a prescriptive, but a *prohibitive* authority, reminiscent of the one exerted on Socrates himself by his celebrated *daimonion*,<sup>76</sup> since he did not tell Alcibiades *what* to do instead of politics, but just urged him to care for his soul. The exhortation to care for one's soul, then, is not seen as the prescription of a specific action, but as a preliminary stage where the disciple is warned of the risk that a certain conduct (i.e., in the case of Alcibiades and many of his

74 Cf. e.g. *Apol. Socr.* 23a–b; 29c6–8; 33c1; *Phaed.* 63e10; *Symp.* 223d11. In *Gorg.* 484c–485c, Callicles claims, against Socrates, that philosophy should be studied by young people, not by adults, whose main task is politics and public life.

75 *Plat. Symp.* 216a4–b4. Transl. by C.J. Rowe, Aris and Phillips, Warminster 1998.

76 Cf. *Plat. Apol.* 31d, and *Phaedr.* 242c.

peers, participation in public life) represents for the soul, and learns about the advantages of refraining from that conduct.

An interesting critique of the lack of prescription in Socrates' teaching can be found in the *Clitophon*. This fragment of dialogue<sup>77</sup> offers a summary of the typical theses of Plato's Socrates, such as the care for one's soul (407b–d, 408a–b), the teachability of the virtue (407c, 408b), and the idea of the involuntaryness of evil (407d–e). Socrates is described as urging people to virtue but his teaching is characterized as just protreptic, not prescriptive:

These speeches and others of the kind, so numerous and so beautifully formulated, that goodness can be taught and that of all things one should care most for oneself, I don't think I've ever said a word against them, nor will I in the future, I suppose. I regard them as very suitable for exhorting people and very useful they simply wake us up from our sleep. So I paid close attention in the hope that I would hear what was *coming next* (μετὰ ταῦτα) ...<sup>78</sup>

Exhortation, then, turns out to be the best part of Socrates' moral teaching, although it is only a preliminary stage of education and should be followed by precise prescriptions. Yet Socrates fails to give any prescriptions. This is why his exhortation to prepare one's soul and learn virtue before turning to any other business is ultimately an obstacle to the attainment of virtue and happiness:

... you were better than any man at the task of exhorting men to devote themselves to virtue, yet of these two alternatives one must be true: either you are capable of effecting thus much only and nothing more,—a thing which might happen also in respect of any other art whatsoever, as for example a man who was no steersman might practice composing an

77 As is well known, the Platonic authorship of *Clitophon* has often been rejected and then reaffirmed. In this context, I consider the text as an important testimony of the debate, which took place in the fourth century, about the usefulness of protreptic ethics and the difference between it and prescriptive education. On its authenticity, structure, and philosophical relevance in the context of Plato's *corpus*, see S.R. Slings (ed.), *Plato. Clitophon. Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries, n. 37), CUP 1999, esp. 59–160. A different perspective, at least with regard to the dialogue's authenticity, is found in C.J. Rowe, "What Might We Learn From the *Clitophon* About the Nature of the Academy?", in K. Döring-M. Erler-S. Schorn (eds.), *Pseudoplatonica. Akten des Kongresses zu den Pseudoplatonica vom 6.–9. Juli 2003 in Bamberg*, Steiner, Stuttgart 2005, 213–224.

78 *Clit.* 408b5–c4. Transl. by S.R. Slings, op. cit.

eulogy of that art as one of high value to mankind, and so too with all the other arts; so against you too one might perhaps bring the same charge in regard to justice, that you are none the more an expert about justice because you eulogise it finely. Not that this is the complaint I make myself; but it must be one or other of these two alternatives,—either you do not possess the knowledge or else you refuse to let me share it ... However, if you are really willing to refrain at last from addressing to me these hortatory discourses, and just as you would have followed up the hortatory discourse, suppose you had been exhorting me in respect of gymnastics that I should not neglect my body, by explaining the nature of the body and the nature of the treatment it requires ... For I shall maintain, Socrates, that while you are of untold value to a man who has not been exhorted, to him who has been exhorted you are almost an actual hindrance in the way of his attaining the goal of virtue and becoming a happy man (σχεδὸν καὶ ἐμπόδιον τοῦ πρὸς τέλος ἀρετῆς ἐλθόντα εὐδαίμονα γενέσθαι).<sup>79</sup>

Aristotle's analogy between the appeal to right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος) and the golden mean and the exhortation to a patient to get treated as prescribed by medical science, which we have encountered in some *Ethics* passages, is a more refined version of the gymnastics analogy at the end of the *Clitophon*. Just as the exhortation to care for one's body should be always followed by the prescription of the exercises that body needs, the exhortation to care for one's soul should immediately be followed by the prescription of virtuous actions. The gymnastics analogy, which plays an important role in Plato as well,<sup>80</sup> is extremely interesting. It does not only indicate that whoever teaches virtue must first exhort people to pursue the good and then prescribe some particular good actions when such actions seem to be necessary and required by the circumstance. The *Clitophon* analogy also suggests that whoever teaches virtue must first exhort people to pursue the good and then prescribe some "exercises of good conduct", or good practices, in order that the soul gets used to behaving in a virtuous way, just as the body gets used to moving correctly through physical exercise. In other words, reading between the lines of this text, we can find a trace of the view that prescription is the formulation of pretty general rules of conduct which everyone, if they have been urged to pursue virtue, will apply in the appropriate situation. The exhortation to virtue in the *Clitophon* recalls the preliminary discourse of the prince in Isocrates' *Nicocles* and even Plato's idea

79 *Clit.* 410b4–e8.

80 Cf. e.g. *Pol.* 294d–e.

of the preamble to the law: the protreptic discourse has to be followed by the prescription of a (rule of) conduct. The *Clitophon* is useful for reconstructing the background to Aristotle's discussion in that it emphasizes the shortcomings of such a moral teaching as Socrates': despite rightly criticizing the traditional as well as the sophistic conception of practical wisdom, Socrates failed to go further than exhortation.

Aristotle is well aware of the problem with Socrates' teaching, and apparently regards it as caused by one of Socrates' two main theses, i.e. that moral virtue is knowledge, or science. Obviously, Aristotle is far from rejecting the Socratic view that intelligence and knowledge are key to action. The standard of ὁρθὸς λόγος can be found in a few passages from Plato's early dialogues.<sup>81</sup> The opinion that moral virtue is unitary is not completely rejected either, in that all particular virtues are essentially linked to practical wisdom.<sup>82</sup> However, Aristotle basically shares the argument advanced in the *Clitophon*. First, he sees moral virtue as a habit of the desiring soul, although it is the rational soul, as practical reason, that prescribes to the desiring soul what it ought to pursue or avoid. This seems to imply that the object of prescription must be either a *particular* object and action, or a *particular* class of actions. The definition of virtue as knowledge of goods and evils or as a sensible use (χρεία) of things,<sup>83</sup> may be accepted by reason but it is not pursued as desirable. In addition, if virtue is regarded as unitary and equal to science, the desiring soul will be unable to operate appro-

81 Cf. especially Plat. *Apol.* 34b1–4: "Now those who are themselves corrupted might have some motive in aiding me; but what reason (λόγον) could their relatives have, who are not corrupted and are already older men, unless it be the right and true reason (τὸν ὁρθόν τε καὶ δίκαιον) that they know that Meletus is lying ...". Transl. by H.N. Fowler, Harvard Univ. Press, 1966. This interesting passage introduces the notion of ὁρθὸς τε καὶ δίκαιος λόγος as "good reason" for both believing something and acting in conformity of a right belief; see also *Phaed.* 73a5–10; 94a1.

82 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1144b32–1145a2: "It is clear, then, from what has been said [i.e. the argument about the relationship between moral virtue and practical wisdom, following which Socrates' equivalence of virtue and knowledge turns out to be partly right and partly wrong, at 1144b1ff.], that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without virtue. But in this way we may also refute the dialectical argument whereby it might be contended that the virtues exist in separation from each other; the same man, it might be said, is not best equipped by nature for all the virtues, so that he will have already acquired one when he has not yet acquired another. This is possible in respect of the natural virtues, but not in respect of those in respect of which a man is called without qualification good; for with the presence of the one quality, practical wisdom, will be given all the virtues". The "dialectical argument", λόγος, refused by Aristotle in virtue of the mutual relation of *phronesis* and moral virtues, recalls the one Protagoras puts forward in *Protag.* 329e.

83 Plat. *Euthyd.* 291a; see also *Gorg.* 457c.

priately when it is called upon to act. The view defended by Plato's Socrates in different dialogues, i.e. that the same thing is good or bad according to whether or not we are guided by wisdom in using it,<sup>84</sup> is right in Aristotle's eyes, but inevitably lacks prescriptive force. Such is the case too with the criterion of right reason and the mean, if not adjusted to the different domains of action. A survey of Aristotle's main arguments against Socrates' concept of virtue will now be in order.

Aristotle criticises the doctrine that virtue is science from different perspectives in both his *Topics* and his *Ethics*. In the *Topics* he does not mention Socrates, but alludes to the moral and logical problems with the view that justice is science.<sup>85</sup> These problems arise from the corresponding view that injustice is ignorance—which is to be interpreted in the light of Socrates' theory that evil is unintentional<sup>86</sup>—and from the fact that a single subject, justice, has two predicates, virtue and science, which cannot be subsumed under the same genus.<sup>87</sup> Aristotle mentions one of his main objections to Socrates' thesis as early as the *Protrepticus*, where he claims that equating the good with knowledge of the good means identifying knowledge of the good with its possession:

It should not be overlooked by someone who is going to scrutinise these subjects that everything that is good and beneficial for the life of humans consists in being used and put into action, and not in the mere knowledge. For we are not healthy by being acquainted with what produces health, but rather by applying it to our bodies, nor are we wealthy by knowing about wealth, but by possessing a very substantial amount nor, most important of all, do we live well by knowing certain sorts of beings, but by acting well (οὐδὲ τὸ πάντων μέγιστον εὖ ζῶμεν τῷ γιγνώσκειν ἅττα τῶν ὄντων, ἀλλὰ τῷ πράττειν εὖ) ...<sup>88</sup>

84 Cf. Plat. *Euthyd.* 280a–281e; *Gorg.* 467e–468b; *Men.* 87e–88c; *Lach.* 198c.

85 Aristot. *Top.* 114b8–13.

86 Cf. Plat. *Apol.* 25c; *Protag.* 358a–e; *Gorg.* 467e–468b.

87 *Top.* 121b24–30; 152a39–b2. An exception, at least in the *Topics*, is apparently represented by *Top.* 121b30 ff., where *phronesis* is defined as both virtue and science, although virtue and science are different genera. Aristotle, however, clarifies that if something is contained in two different genera, either these genera are subordinate to each other, or both fall under a third genus. Therefore, virtue and science are both subordinate to a third genus that can be referred to as *hexis* or *diathesis*, cf. 121b37–38.

88 Iambl. *Comm. math.* 26, 79, 15–24 Festa = B 52 Düring. Text and translation by D.S. Hutchinson-M.R. Johnson, *Aristotle: Protrepticus or Exhortation to Philosophy. Citations, Fragments, Paraphrases, and Other Evidence*, [www.protrepticus.info](http://www.protrepticus.info), updated September 2017. See also I. Düring, *Aristotle's Protrepticus. An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborg 1961.

Knowledge and practical wisdom certainly play a guiding role with respect to action, but this does not mean that no other conditions need to be satisfied for moral virtue to be achieved. To understand the polemical meaning of this argument we have to consider *Eth. eud.* 1216b3–21, where Socrates is explicitly mentioned as holding that the aim of life is knowledge of virtue. Thus, he, rightly, sought the essence of each particular virtue:

Socrates, then, the elder, thought the knowledge of virtue to be the end (τέλος), and used to inquire what is (τί ἐστίν) justice, what bravery and each of the parts of virtue; and his conduct was reasonable (ἐποίει γὰρ ταῦτ' εὐλόγως), for he thought all the virtues to be kinds of knowledge (ἐπιστήμας), so that to know justice and to be just came simultaneously (ἅμα); for the moment that we have learned geometry or building we are builders and geometers. Therefore he inquired what virtue is, not how or from what it arises (ἐζήτει τί ἐστίν ἀρετή, ἀλλ' οὐ πῶς γίνεται καὶ ἐκ τίνων). This is correct with regard to theoretical knowledge, for there is no other part of astronomy or physics or geometry except knowing and contemplating the nature of the things which are the subjects of those sciences; though nothing prevents them from being in an incidental way useful to us for much that we cannot do without. But the end of the productive sciences is different from science and knowledge, e.g. health from medical science, law and order (or something of the sort) from political science. Now to know anything that is noble is itself noble; but regarding virtue, at least, not to know what it is, but to know out of what it arises is most precious.

It is noteworthy that Aristotle uses here the term τέλος to refer to the final objective of Socrates' inquiry, i.e. the *definition* of virtue, and indicates the different questions that a practical investigation, according to him, has to respond to, i.e. τί ἐστίν, πῶς γίνεται, ἐκ τίνων γίνεται. Aristotle's criticism describes Socrates as only committed to finding out the correct definition of virtue: his purpose was to answer the question τί ἐστίν, not πῶς γίνεται. What is wrong with Socrates is not the method he adopts to reach the aim of his inquiry, but rather the aim itself, which is the aim of a theoretical, not a practical investigation. As to the distinction between *what is it?*, *how?*, and *from what?*, the first question aims to formulate a definition, while the second and third both concern practical knowledge, albeit in two different ways. The question πῶς requires as an answer a line of reasoning showing us the way we should act in order to become virtuous. The question ἐκ τίνων refers to an inquiry on the causes and conditions that make a particular action, or course of actions, preferable over



another. Aristotle, as we shall see, considers the questions *how?* and *from what?* as key components of deliberative reasoning. The aim of Socrates' inquiry is wrong because its premise, i.e. that all virtues are sciences, is wrong. Were it right, courage could be put on a par with mathematics. Yet we become mathematicians as soon as (ἄμα) we learn mathematical propositions, but are not courageous just because we know the definition of courage. Aristotle equates the search for virtue with a "productive", ποιητική, science, whose end is distinct from its knowledge, just as health is distinct from medicine.

Further criticism of Socrates' view is to be found at *Eth. eud.* 1246a26 ff. Aristotle argues that each thing can be used both according to its natural purpose and otherwise (1246a27: χρήσασθαι καὶ ἐφ' ᾧ πέφυκε καὶ ἄλλως). So it is with knowledge: people who possess knowledge can both say the truth and act correctly and make intentionally (ἐκὼν) a mistake. But the fact that one can act intentionally in a wrong way precisely because one possesses knowledge represents a challenge to the view that virtue is science:

If, then, all the virtues are kinds of knowledge, one might use justice also as injustice, and so one would be unjust and do unjust actions from justice, as ignorant things may be done from knowledge. But if this is impossible, it is clear that the virtues are not species of knowledge. And even if ignorance cannot proceed from knowledge, but only error and the doing of the same things as proceed from ignorance, it must be remembered that from justice one will not act as from injustice.<sup>89</sup>

It is not easy to understand the rest of Aristotle's argument owing to the poor state of the transmitted text.<sup>90</sup> The general sense of the passage, however, should be as follows. The view that virtue is science is unacceptable for the possession of science enables us to say something true as well as something intentionally false; yet it is impossible that the habit of justice allows us to act unjustly. If practical wisdom (φρόνησις) were science, we could perform a foolish act precisely *because* we possess wisdom. This seems to be absurd for two reasons: for the same reason that a moral virtue, e.g. justice, is incompatible with acts that are contrary to moral virtue; and because practical wisdom is an

89 1246a35–b4. Transl. by J. Solomon.

90 See M. Woods, *Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics*, cit., 169 f.; P.L. Donini, *Aristotele. Etica Eudemia. Traduzione, introduzione e note*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2005<sup>2</sup>, 220 f. Recently P.L.P. Simpson, "On the Text of Some Disputed Passages in Aristotle's *Ethica Eudemia*", *Classical Quarterly*, 62, 2012, 541–552, is more conservative, noting some cases of "unwarranted emendations".

also intellectual virtue making deliberation possible and guiding actions within the domains of the single moral virtues, which are subordinate to it.<sup>91</sup> Now, an art or a science can be used in a way that is either in accord or in contrast with its nature: in the latter case, the use may be directed by a different and higher-level art or science, which prescribes a different use from the normal one. All of this is impossible in the case of practical wisdom, for practical wisdom has no intellectual virtue over itself which may use it in an abnormal way:

Over other kinds of knowledge, then, there is something superior that diverts them (ἄλλη κυρία ποιεῖ τὴν στροφὴν); but how can there be any knowledge that diverts the highest knowledge of all? There is no longer any knowledge to do this. But neither can virtue do it, for wisdom uses that; for the virtue of the ruling part uses that of the subject (ἡ γὰρ τοῦ ἄρχοντος ἀρετὴ τῇ τοῦ ἀρχομένου χρήται).<sup>92</sup>

We can reasonably assume that Aristotle here is thinking of someone using an object in a different way from that prescribed by the science of its regular use, and with a different aim from the one corresponding to the nature of the object. This is somewhat similar to the case of the acrobatic dancer mentioned by Aristotle,<sup>93</sup> who walks on her hands and plays with her foot in view of an acrobatic or choreographic end, not in accord with the natural use and function of one's limbs. It is impossible, then, that we should act unjustly if we possess the habit of justice (unless we assume that a just person is ordered to perform an unjust act by an authority pursuing a certain aim of its own; but this hypothesis is not even alluded to here). Likewise, it is impossible that we should act foolishly when we possess practical wisdom, for practical wisdom is an intellectual virtue superior to the moral virtues.

Aristotle does not explicitly refer to Socrates, yet he is clearly attacking his doctrine. The argument about the inappropriate use of science—insofar as

91 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1249b14; *Eth. nic.* 1143a7–8, on the prescriptive character of practical wisdom; see also *Eth. nic.* 1144b10–17: “We seem to see this much, that, while one may be led astray by them (*scil.* natural virtues), as a strong body which moves without sight may stumble badly, because of its lack of sight, still, if a man once acquires thought that makes a difference in action; and his state, while still like what it was, will then be virtue in the strict sense (*κυρία*). Therefore, as in the part of us which forms opinions there are two types, cleverness and practical wisdom, so too in the moral part there are two types, natural virtue and virtue in the strict sense, and of these the latter involves practical wisdom”.

92 *Eth. eud.* 1246b8–12.

93 *Eth. eud.* 1246a33–35.

it claims that we can intentionally act in an evil way because we possess the knowledge of goods and evils, just as whoever knows a science can intentionally make a mistake—implies that people who make a mistake on purpose are better, i.e. wiser, than people who make a mistake inadvertently and out of sheer ignorance. This argument is not new within the Socratic tradition and both Plato and Xenophon discuss it. In *Hipp. min.* 374e–375b, Plato has Socrates argue that a soul which errs intentionally (ἐκῶν) is better (ἀμείνων) than a soul which errs unintentionally. This conclusion is reached through an induction considering various instruments and the arts that use them, in order to demonstrate that the deliberateness of their bad use reveals the command of both the instrument and the art. Only those who know how to use something can deliberately make a mistake. Just as we prefer to have a servant who makes intentional mistakes, rather than one who makes mistakes out of incompetence, we should prefer the soul that makes intentional mistakes, for an intentional mistake usually presupposes knowledge and skill. Both Socrates and Hippias are perfectly aware of the paradoxical aspect of this conclusion and of the need to correct it.<sup>94</sup> No solution is proposed, however, and the dialogue ends aporetically. The same issue is raised by Xenophon in a similar, though not identical, way in *Mem.* IV 2, 16–40. While discussing justice with Euthydemus, Socrates considers the cases of a general lying in order to cheer up his soldiers, a father lying to his children to have them take a drug, and someone taking a weapon away from its owner who has gone out of his mind. As these examples show, someone can act unjustly (e.g. lie) and yet do the right thing in that they are the cause of a good, not an evil. These cases suffice to raise the aporia that whoever does wrong intentionally is superior to someone who does wrong unintentionally, whereas everyone thinks that the reverse is true, i.e. that whoever does wrong intentionally is guiltier than someone who does wrong unintentionally. The problem arises from the fact that to commit an unjust act intentionally one has to possess knowledge, while involuntary evil is caused by ignorance. Xenophon goes on to consider another case, which Aristotle will also discuss,<sup>95</sup> i.e. that of someone intentionally making a spelling mistake. Unlike Plato, Xenophon tries to solve the aporia in order to

94 See 375d1–7, in which the conclusion from the premises about arts and skills, once applied to general practice, is perceived as greatly disturbing. On the paradox of *Hippias minor* see G.R.F. Ferrari, “Socratic Irony as Pretence”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (2008), 1–33, and F.M. Petrucci, “Sulle tracce della virtù nell’*Ippia minore*. Tra semantica prestazionale e prospettiva epistemica”, *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft*, N.F. 36 (2012), 138–156.

95 *Eth. eud.* 1246a33.

support Socrates' doctrines that moral virtue is equal to knowledge of good and evil and, therefore, doing evil is involuntary. After reaffirming the importance of the knowledge of oneself,<sup>96</sup> critically reconsidering the current appreciation of material and external goods,<sup>97</sup> and urging his interlocutors to look to the cases of Daedalus and Palamedes and beware of the dangers of wisdom,<sup>98</sup> Socrates finally claims that the cause of evil is the presumption of knowing coupled with the failure of self-examination (τὸ σφόδρα πιστεύειν εἰδέναι οὐδ' ἔσκεψαι).<sup>99</sup> This conclusion is not a real solution to the paradox that whoever does wrong intentionally seems to be superior to someone who does wrong out of ignorance. Yet it is in keeping with Socrates' view, illustrated also by Plato's *Apology*, that moral education is based on the scrutiny of opinions and self-examination.

Plato's discussion of the matter seems to be more problematic than Xenophon's. It is worth noting, however, that Plato employs such notions as "use" (χρεία) (*Hipp. min.* 374a7) and "to practice" (ἐργάζομαι, 374a5, 8, b2, d7, e1, etc.) that clarify just what is the knowledge that we have to possess to intentionally make a mistake. It is, broadly speaking, the practical knowledge of *how* things are to be done. Plato's and Xenophon's texts imply the view that there is a kind of executive, poietic knowledge, different from normative knowledge. Executive knowledge is key to the attainment of a practical end. Yet it does not coincide with the normative knowledge of the end, for normative knowledge of the *end* requires that something is seen as a good worth attaining. Besides, it is one thing to know about *how* we have to behave, e.g. that we must not lie; it is quite another to know what the highest human good is, considering the circumstances. It may happen, then, that we know what the highest good is and yet deliberately lie, because we know that, although lying is not a good action in ordinary circumstances, sometimes it is instrumental in attaining the ultimate good we desire.

From Plato's and Xenophon's treatment of the Socratic paradox, then, we can deduce the following three ideas: there are different ways to know things; some kinds of knowledge must serve an end; the kinds of knowledge that serve an end may concern both technical operations and moral acts (it is not just pharmacology that is useful to health, but also lying to children in order to have them take a medicine). It is only in Aristotle, however, that these views are

96 Xenoph. *Mem.* IV 2, 24–30.

97 *Mem.* IV 2, 31–32.

98 *Mem.* IV 2, 33.

99 IV 2, 36.

clearly stated; he criticises the Socratic doctrine that virtue is science, pointing out that it leads to a consequence at odds with Socrates' thesis that whoever does wrong does so out of ignorance, i.e. unwillingly. It is quite clear that Aristotle does not accept this thesis as it is formulated in the *Protagoras*, although he does appreciate Socrates' view that practical wisdom is the strongest thing the human soul can house,<sup>100</sup> and that it cannot be crushed by desire. For Aristotle, however, practical wisdom is not the same as science nor is it the sole condition for moral virtue.

Aristotle rejects Socrates' thesis that evil is unintentional and produced by ignorance not only because of the paradox we have just referred to, but for reasons much more closely linked with his own practical philosophy and extremely significant for the theme of prescription. He is surely committed to some aspects of Socrates' ethics and he maintains, as we have seen, that the so-called main virtues (ἡρώται), unlike "natural" ones, are not really separated from one another. Yet he refuses Socrates' theory of involuntariness of evil because it undermines the distinction between the knowledge of good and the practice of virtue; practice of virtue, according to Aristotle, requires the education of desire and emotions, not only a purely intellectual exercise.<sup>101</sup> Aristotle's beliefs that desire is a basic cause of action and that moral virtue is a habit of character regulating desire, are, so to speak, the definitive thesis that Aristotle sets against Socratic equation of virtue with science. This is clear from *Eth. eud.* 1246b12–36, where a paradox is presented that, despite some problems in the transmitted text, we can reconstruct as follows.<sup>102</sup> If evil behaviour is caused by ignorance of

100 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1246b33–34: "So it is clear that wisdom and virtue go together ... and the Socratic saying that nothing is stronger (ισχυρότερον) than wisdom is right". Aristotle's remark refers to Plat. *Protag.* 353b–c, or *Gorg.* 488c–d.

101 Some interpreters have recently raised the question of Aristotle's real attitude toward Socrates' refusal of *akrasia*, focussing on the fact that in *Eth. nic.* VII 3–5 he claims that *akrasia* may be caused by the absence of the major premise of a practical syllogism, i.e. by lack of knowledge. Well-balanced surveys are in P. Destrée, "Aristotle on the Causes of *Akrasia*", in C. Bobonich-P. Destrée (eds.), *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy. From Socrates to Plotinus*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2007, 139–165, and M. Zingano, "Akrasia and the Method of Ethics", in *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy*, cit., 167–191.

102 I follow, in the general lines, M. Woods, *Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics. Book I, II, and VIII*, cit., 171–176. Woods advances an interpretation of this difficult passage, which is also sufficiently conservative of the transmitted text. Woods however, excludes that the paradox is conceived by Aristotle against Socrates, for: "Socrates held that knowledge was supreme, and would not have accepted a distinction between wisdom and virtue" (p. 171); such a distinction would be the presupposition of what is said at 1246b8–12, i.e., that wisdom might be meant as subordinate to moral virtue. Furthermore: "The view of incontinence as the corruption of wisdom by vice in the non-rational part of the soul is hardly

the true good, then the behaviour of incontinent people (*ἀκρατεῖς*) must also be viewed as resulting from ignorance. Yet incontinent people are those who know what the good is and fail to do it because they are overwhelmed by too strong a desire. If we are to account for this fact by reconciling it with the doctrine that virtue is science, we have to assume that the vice (*μολθηρία*) in the irrational part of the soul causes ignorance in its rational part and twists (*στρέψει*) wisdom. That is to say, the equation of moral virtue with science is to be regarded as a relation of reciprocity where the presence of one of the two is a sufficient condition for the appearance of the other. The presence of knowledge is the condition for virtuous action; the presence of ignorance is the condition for evil action. Unlike Socrates, however, Aristotle does not consider knowledge and moral virtue as two different aspects of a single disposition, but as two distinct dispositions pertaining to two parts of the soul (knowledge, or intellectual virtue, resides in the rational part, while moral virtue in the non-rational part). To these dispositions, he applies the relation of reciprocity into which he converted Socrates' original thesis. This leads to a paradoxical conclusion: just as desire may cause us to act in a wrong way although we possess knowledge and intellectual virtue, so we may act in a right way even if we are ignorant, and be sensible even if we lack wisdom:

For it is absurd that vice occurring sometimes in the irrational part should twist the virtue in the rational part and make the man ignorant, but that virtue in the irrational part, when ignorance is present in the rational, should not divert the latter and make the man judge wisely and as is right,

---

Socratic: Socrates' view was that everyone desires the good, all other desires being derivative from that, and so vicious action is always the result of false beliefs that have led to misdirected derivative desires. So Socrates would hardly have allowed the possibility of knowledge in the rational and vice in the non-rational soul, or, in general, of a good state in one part affecting or being affected by a bad state in the other ... Aristotle's opponent seems to be someone who identifies wisdom with knowledge, but concedes that it can be misused, making knowledge or ignorance in the rational part vary independently of virtue or vice in the other; he will thus deny that 'nothing is stronger than knowledge'; whereas Socrates would exclude the overmastery of knowledge ..." (p. 175). I rather presume that Aristotle considers the paradox of the foolish behaviour in presence of wisdom as a possible consequence of the equivalence between virtue and science. Socrates' opinion, according to which virtuous practice consists of knowing what is virtuous, either corresponds to the refusal of *akrasia* (which is contrary to experience), or turns out to be the absurdity exhibited in *Hipp. min.* 374e–375b. For a more positive view about the relation of Aristotle's theory of action to Socrates, see M.D. Boeri, "Sobre los trasfondos socráticos en la teoría aristotélica de la acción", *Revista Philosophica*, 33 (2008), 7–26.

and again, wisdom in the rational part should not make the intemperance in the irrational part act temperately.<sup>103</sup>

Of course, the conclusion that it is possible to behave sensibly without possessing knowledge (ἀπὸ ἀγνοίας χρήσθαι φρονίμως) is a paradox resulting from the (Socratic) view that virtue coincides with knowledge of the good, as compared to the case of incontinent people. Yet, in Aristotle, incontinence is related to the division of the soul into reason and the irrational part, which are the seat of intellectual and moral virtue respectively. Such a distinction plays no role in Socrates's thesis that virtue is science. The view that only this distinction can solve the problem of ἀκρασία is confirmed by *Eth. nic.* 1145b21–27. Unsurprisingly, in this passage Aristotle claims that for Socrates there is no such thing as ἀκρασία. He then shows that incontinence stems from the failure to conclude a practical syllogism: the incontinent does have a universal premise about the good, but fails to come to the conclusion that the good ought to be done. This may be caused by the lack of the minor premise, i.e. by failure to understand that the particular situation the incontinent is in contradicts the content of the universal premise.<sup>104</sup> Although we are generally aware that some things ought not to be pursued, we are unable to see that the particular thing we have come across, here and now, belongs to the set of things that should not be pursued. So, we fail to conclude the syllogism and to refrain from pursuing what we should not pursue. It would seem, then, that incontinence is the product of some sort of ignorance, and that Aristotle is at a loss to find an alternative to Socrates' solution. Yet this is inconsistent with both the account of incontinence he gives in other passages and works (i.e. the conflict between desire, or passion, and reason), and his claim in 1145b23–27 that Socrates denied the existence of incontinence because if someone possesses the science of the good they cannot be turned away from it. For Aristotle incontinence arises mainly from the fact that human beings may feel a desire whose formulation is an opinion at odds with the one that constitutes the major premise. As a result, although we know that a certain action is blameworthy, we perform it—not because of our lack of knowledge, but because of an actual desire that translates into an injunctive premise (“sweet food is tasty and you must eat it”) conflicting with the prohibitive premise (“you must avoid sweet food because it is bad for your health”).

103 *Eth. eud.* 1246b19–25.

104 Cf. D. Charles, “*Nicomachean Ethics* VII. 3: Varieties of *akrasia*”, in C. Natali (ed.), *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII. Symposium Aristotelicum*, OUP, Oxford 2009, 41–71, esp. 62–66.

So that it turns out that a man behaves incontinently under the influence (in a sense) of reason and opinion, and of opinion not contrary in itself, but only incidentally—for the appetite is contrary, not the opinion—to the right reason.<sup>105</sup>

Aristotle's criticism of Socrates is relevant to our discussion of prescription because of its distinction between intellectual and moral virtue and its definition of the latter as a habit agreeing with right reason and regulating desire. The concept of desire (ὄρεξις) in its different senses, but particularly in that of volition (βούλησις), i.e. "reasoned desire", has a prominent role in Aristotle's theories of action and deliberation.<sup>106</sup> Action, as a species of animal movement, is a product of desire. Deliberation, i.e. the reasoning that prepares action, is therefore promoted by a volition. Any deliberate conduct presupposes a reasoned desire to carry out a purpose, to attain an end. Generally speaking, virtuous conduct presupposes the desire to be happy. Happiness, however, is not just the product of virtue: Aristotle emphasizes that goods of a different kind (health, wealth, friendship) are also crucial for a happy life. Therefore, Aristotle is perhaps best described as holding that virtuous conduct presupposes the aim to shape a good character. In his definition of moral virtue, a significant role is played by the notions of habit, experience, exercise, and time. Good character is a disposition of the desiring soul that cannot simply result from knowledge of the good. What is needed is the constant exercise of action aimed at good objects.

If the definition of moral virtue entails the notion of good character, then prescription will be the strategy of practical reason for shaping good characters. Socrates' doctrine that virtue is science has surely a highly protreptic value, since it prompts people to examine their moral views and know themselves. As a prescriptive strategy aimed at shaping a good character, however, it is totally ineffective, because it fails to prescribe a specific line of conduct and provides no satisfactory answer to the question about *how to do* something.

105 *Eth. nic.* 1147a35–b3.

106 See the recent analysis of G. Grönroos, "Wish, Motivation and the Human Good in Aristotle", *Phronesis*, 60 (2015), 60–87, esp. 63, on the notion of *boulesis* as "action-guiding" desire.



#### 4 Prescription in Plato's *Republic*

Aristotle sets great store by Plato's discussion of the law and its limits. As we have seen and shall see again later in our inquiry, his arguments on prescription have their roots in passages from the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. Although Aristotle's stance is basically different from Plato's, its link with those dialogues is quite evident. This leads us now to ask the question about the role played by the *Republic* in Aristotle's theory of prescription. All in all, we can say that for our present inquiry the *Republic* is less significant than the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. It is nonetheless necessary to illustrate what Plato's most important political work contributes to the background to Aristotle's view of prescription, for at least two reasons.

First, we may note that the language Aristotle uses to talk about prescription takes on its definitive form in Plato's *Republic*. As we have seen,<sup>107</sup> the language concerning rule and authority and related to the prescription of rules of conduct is quite common both in the v century and in some of Plato's contemporaries, most notably Isocrates. Yet it is Plato who systematically uses, in his *Republic*, the verbs ἐπιτάττειν and προστάττειν, as well as their cognate nouns, to refer to any form of prescriptive measure.<sup>108</sup> These verbs are also employed to indicate the assignment of a task, while their cognate nouns, πρόσταγμα and ἐπίταγμα, indicate the task that a citizen has to perform.<sup>109</sup>

The second reason why the *Republic* should be considered is that some passages from this work anticipate issues related to prescription that will be extensively dealt with by Aristotle (although often with different solutions as compared to Plato). These passages deserve a closer look because they were quite probably carefully analyzed by Aristotle. In *Resp.* 342c11–13 Socrates argues that no science or art “considers or enjoins” the good of the stronger, as shown by the example of the doctor prescribing what is good for the patient, not for himself. The sentence “no art considers or prescribes the advantage of the stronger (ἐπιστήμη γε οὐδεμία τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον σκοπεῖ οὐδ' ἐπιτάττει)”, where τὸ συμφέρον is the object of both σκοπεῖ and ἐπιτάττει, indicates that Socrates does not distinguish, at least in this passage, the content of prescription from the end with a view to which the prescription is given.<sup>110</sup> The advantage, τὸ συμφέρον, is precisely the end to be attained through the prescribed action. The failure

107 See *supra*, pp. 14–29.

108 See e.g. *Resp.* 339d6–8; 339e; 340a5; 342e3; 425d7; 453b10; 455e4; 527c1; 527d6; 530c3; 556b1.

109 *Resp.* 359a3–4; 423c2–5.

110 The relevant use of σκοπεῖν and σκοπός as the act of aiming at a particular or general practical act is also found in *Apol.* 28b8 and *Gorg.* 507d6–7.

to distinguish between the prescribed conduct and its end is understandable from Thrasymachus' point of view. Those who give some prescription do so with no other aim than their own interest, and what they order other people to do may be something immediately useful or pleasant for them, e.g. performing a menial task. When he points out that those who rule and give orders do not do so in view of their personal interests but aiming at the good of the ruled,<sup>111</sup> Socrates does not draw an explicit distinction between a prescribed action and the aim with which it is prescribed, but certainly comes close to doing so. Aristotle will turn the distinction between the prescribed action and the end for which the action is prescribed into a key component of his system of practical sciences and, most notably, of his theory of deliberation.

Moreover, Socrates explains (342d10–e11) that as the doctor prescribes what is good for the patient; just as the commander of a ship, *despite not being a sailor* (ἀλλ' οὐ ναύτης), gives orders to the sailors with a view to their safety; similarly, those who exert power do so in the interest of the ruled, despite not sharing their status of political subjection. Socrates' remark contains an interesting element that helps us understand a particular aspect of Aristotle's view of prescription. The examples taken from the arts, the doctor and the commander of a ship, show that prescriptive authority consists in prescribing actions and rules of conduct, which are not necessarily observed by those prescribing them. Socrates' claim aims to persuade Thrasymachus that authority is based on knowledge of the good, not on force. Yet this view also implies that those who rule need not carry out themselves the orders they have the right to give. Doctors' prescriptions aim at *other people's* good. If the commander of a ship orders the sailors to perform a manoeuvre he does not, and perhaps cannot, perform himself, this is because, despite knowing the aim of his order and what action can attain it, he does not need to be able to perform that action.

In *Resp.* 601d–e Socrates discusses a different kind of prescription concerning the technical-scientific domain. He begins by distinguishing three arts: the one that uses an object, the one that produces it, and the one that imitates it. What is interesting for us here is the distinction between the art that uses (χρησόμενη) an object and the art that produces it (ποιήσουςα). The excellence of each thing—as Socrates goes on to argue—is aimed at its use.<sup>112</sup> Use, then, seems to be more important than production—or rather, the use of the produced thing is the aim of production:

111 See also *Resp.* 346e–347a.

112 Cf. *Resp.* 601d4–6.

“The user of anything is the one who knows most of it by experience, and that he reports to the maker the good or bad effects in use of the thing he uses. As, for example, the flute-player reports to the flute-maker which flutes respond and serve rightly in flute-playing, and will order the kind that must be made, and the other will obey and serve him.” “Of course.” “The one, then, possessing knowledge, reports about the goodness or the badness of the flutes, and the other, believing, will make them.” “Yes.” “Then in respect of the same implement the maker will have right belief about its excellence and defects from association with the man who knows and being compelled to listen to him, but the user will have true knowledge.”<sup>113</sup>

This passage is extremely important for understanding the hierarchical relationship Aristotle establishes between production and use. The fact that, in a famous passage from *Politics*,<sup>114</sup> he considers the example of the flute-player and the flute-maker as metaphors of the ruler and the ruled respectively suggests that he reflected on this *Republic* passage. As Plato's text shows, the verb ἐπιτάττειν not only expresses political authority, but also expresses the prescription of practical or technical rules about how to do something, which will in turn serve to produce another object or carry out a certain function. This type of ἐπιτάξις presupposes a kind of knowledge which is not productive, but related to the use of things. Since someone who knows how to use something is also able to prescribe to the producer how to produce it, we have to conclude that knowing how to use something is more important than and superior to knowing how to produce it. Furthermore, as Socrates points out, those who give prescriptions know, and those who produce *believe* them. This means that producers who perform what has been prescribed may not have real knowledge of the produced object and its function, but just an opinion about it, i.e. they know the object thanks to the guidelines they were given by those who know the use and function of the object. The distinction between the the user's knowledge and producer's opinion is similar to, though not identical with, Aristotle's dis-

113 *Resp.* 601d8–602a1: Πολλὴ ἄρα ἀνάγκη τὸν χρώμενον ἐκάστω ἐμπειρότατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἄγγελον γίγνεσθαι τῷ ποιητῇ οἷα ἀγαθὰ ἢ κακὰ ποιεῖ ἐν τῇ χρειᾷ ᾧ χρήται· οἷον αὐλητῆς που αὐλοποιῶ ἐξαγγέλλει περὶ τῶν αὐλῶν, οἳ ἂν ὑπηρετώσιν ἐν τῷ αὐλεῖν, καὶ ἐπιτάξει οἷους δεῖ ποιεῖν, ὁ δ' ὑπηρετήσῃ. Πῶς δ' οὐ; Οὐκοῦν ὁ μὲν εἰδὼς ἐξαγγέλλει περὶ χρηστῶν καὶ πονηρῶν αὐλῶν, ὁ δὲ πιστεῦων ποιήσει; Ναί. Τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἄρα σκεύους ὁ μὲν ποιητῆς πίστιν ὀρθὴν ἔξει περὶ κάλλους τε καὶ πονηρίας, συνὼν τῷ εἰδότει καὶ ἀναγκαζόμενος ἀκούειν παρὰ τοῦ εἰδότος, ὁ δὲ χρώμενος ἐπιστήμην. Translation by P. Shorey, *Plato. Republic*, vol. II, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1969.

114 *Polit.* 1277b29–31.

inction between a ruling citizen and a ruled citizen who by birth is equal to the ruler:<sup>115</sup> the ruler possesses *phronesis*, which is prescriptive, whereas the ruled only possesses true opinion. As regards the present research, the most significant aspect of the *Republic* passage is the hierarchy it establishes between prescriptive wisdom and productive competence.

There is no denying, however, that the general perspective of the *Republic* is quite different from that of Aristotle. Plato wishes to set quite a strict limit on the formulation of laws and rules of conduct. More specifically, he is committed to outlining a wise constitution, which will have the merit of preventing continuing alteration of the political laws. In the III and IV books, Plato lays down the basic principle of the perfect constitution and criticises traditional law-making. It is in this context, I think, that Aristotle's view of prescription departs from Plato's. In *Resp.* 403c–410a, Plato considers the role played by gymnastics in the education of the rulers of the perfect state: while talking about gymnastics, he offers a new perspective on the aims and tasks of medicine and justice. His discussion is based on the principle that doctors as well as judges should avoid repeatedly resorting to corrective measures. For frequent reliance on medicine and justice indicates the weakness of the body and the soul, i.e. poor education and a bad constitution.<sup>116</sup> When a body requires sustained treatment and a soul frequent punishment, the State should leave that body and that soul to die.<sup>117</sup> The basic idea underlying Plato's discussion is that a repeated normative and prescriptive action, in gymnastics, medicine and particularly in politics, amounts to a *corrective* intervention failing to eliminate the errors it tries to correct. On Plato's view in the *Republic*, then, the best State requires a set of detailed norms and prescriptions that do not need to be repeatedly altered. Judges should act like good doctors, and punish the errors of well-educated and uncorrupted souls, just as medicine should only treat temporary injuries and indispositions, not chronic diseases. Any change to a law in an imperfect State is the sign of a gap in the law, whereas in the perfect State it is necessarily a change for the worse.

In the IV book, Plato once again emphasizes that the guardians' prescriptions should remain unaltered.<sup>118</sup> The chief problem with law-making aiming to minutely regulate the citizens' lives is not only that it dwells on petty issues (the *σμικρὰ νόμιμα* in *Resp.* 425a8), but also that, in the absence of such general directive principles as a good constitution supplies, it "pursues" each particu-

<sup>115</sup> *Polit.* 1277b25–29.

<sup>116</sup> *Resp.* 405a6–b3.

<sup>117</sup> 409a.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. for instance 424c3–6, 425d7–e7.

lar case. This model of social life is compared to a doctor who prescribes patients any number of different drugs and remedies, rather than order them to lead a healthy life, thus preventing them from a complete recovery. Although Plato claims that it would not be appropriate to give prescriptions to virtuous citizens (οὐκ ἄξιον ἀγαθοῖς ἐπιτάττειν), what he criticises is not the detailed character of prescriptions, but their proliferation, diversity and frequency. A good constitution is vital for the State in that it provides general normative principles for citizens to rely on when tackling certain practical issues. These normative principles are the basis for prescriptions that may be extremely detailed, and will never need to be increased or altered. Plato, at least in the *Republic*, downplays the role of law-making, which he views, when it is frequent and diverse, as a corrective activity, a continuous ἐπανόρθωμα of the prescriptions in force. Human action, on the contrary, must be founded on a constitution seeing to the education of the citizens and as much as possible preventing shifts and innovations in the traditional customs.

Aristotle will regard this view as extremely limited, though not entirely wrong. He grants that the law can have gaps and even be wrong. Yet the need to correct and alter the written law is not always the consequence of a bad constitution, but merely the product of the shift in circumstances and the diversity of human characters. This is why law-making must be more wide-ranging than is claimed in the *Republic*, and has to include not only the ability to legislate, but also the ability to deliberate, i.e. apply general normative principles to particular cases by means of specific prescriptions. This being so, prescription, i.e. the indication of a particular conduct required by a certain situation, is not always the correction of an error in the law, but very often the necessary completion of a law that does not provide for every imaginable case. What Plato regards as a characteristic of imperfect political regimes is for Aristotle a normal, “physiological” aspect of practical reality. In the *Republic*, the adjustments practical reason has to make in the face of a situation not provided for by the laws are described as unwelcome; for Aristotle, they are the consequence of an inherent character of human action. In his view, the reasoning process leading to prescription is not corrective in such a negative sense as Plato attaches to the ἐπανόρθωσις of the laws. Rather, it is a precise and disciplined strategy of practical reason.

## 5 The Reasons for a Historiographical Inquiry. Synopsis of the Book

A systematic, historiographically-based study of Aristotle's view of prescription is still lacking. Aristotle is not regarded as having a specific interest in prescrip-

tion, though there are many studies on topics that are related to prescription and rules of conduct, such as Aristotle's treatment of different constitutions and deliberative organs as well as practical wisdom and its prescriptive role. These studies have offered great help for the present book, providing the appropriate critical context into which Aristotle's ideas on prescription are to be considered. However, the main aim of this research is to show that prescription, far from being a marginal and secondary theme, is a central issue in Aristotle's practical philosophy. This is why, although it may seem that prescription is primarily a matter of politics, and that terms such as ἐπίταξις, ἐπίταγμα, and ἐπιτάσσειν are more frequent in the *Politics*<sup>119</sup> than in the *Ethics*, my analysis will focus particularly on the latter. From the terminological point of view, various prescriptive forms are already used in the *Ethics*.<sup>120</sup> From the conceptual point of view, the act of prescribing indicates the exercise of authority *lato sensu*, not only political authority: soul is "prescriptive" with respect to body, reason to desire.<sup>121</sup>

As we saw in the previous pages of this chapter, the generation before Aristotle outlined some kinds of prescription: the command given to the common man and the precept issued to the young prince (Isocrates); the rule based on moral good rather than political authority and force (Xenophon); the regulatory discipline that allows the application of the law to different situations and kinds of people (Plato). The author of *Clitophon* criticises Socrates for only exhorting young people to virtue, without prescribing them the appropriate actions to become virtuous. All this, in my opinion, becomes a matter of careful reflection for Aristotle, who derives from these ideas a more general line of thought: prescription, both as the regulation of desire on the part of individual reason and the regulation of others' conduct by an authority, is the act by which practical reason issues a given action or course of action as the best means to achieve an end or to apply *in concreto* a general norm. In other words, prescription is essentially connected to deliberation. Understanding the place of prescription in Aristotle's practical philosophy requires, therefore, that it be analyzed in the light of Aristotelian treatment of practical reasoning. This is the reason why the theory of deliberation occupies a central place in this research.

119 Cf. *Polit.* 1255b35, 1260b6, 1286a11, 1292a20, 1299a26–27, 1325a26, 1326b14, 1333a6.

120 For the adjective ἐπιτακτικός, cf. *Eth. eud.* 1220a9, b5; *Eth. nic.* 1143a8; for the adverb ἐπιτακτικῶς, *Eth. eud.* 1249b14; for ἐπιτάσσειν, *Eth. eud.* 1219b30, 1249b15; *Eth. nic.* 1136b31, 1143b35, 1145a9, a11, 1158a32. Also the (less numerous) occurrences of the synonymous πρόσταγμα, προστακτικός, προστακτικῶς, and προστάσσειν should be considered, see e.g. *Eth. nic.* 1105b16, 1106b2, 110a5, 1114b30, 1116a36, 1119b13, 1129b19, 1130b23–24.

121 Cf. *Top.* 128b19; *De an.* 433a1; *Metaph.* 982a18.

As the outcome of deliberative reasoning, prescription is analogous to, though not identical with, choice (or decision). It is not identical with choice, *προαίρεσις*, because prescription is both the preference of what to do here and now, and reflection about a way to solve types of problems by means of types of actions and practices. What we have here is not only the individual, episodic, choice to perform an action; we have also the identification of an action that will be performed by someone other than the deliberating subject, in all those circumstances that seem to require the performance of that action. So, prescription implies also rule-making, not only decision-making.

Moreover, when we move, so to speak, from the concept of choice to that of prescription, the place of desire changes: a driver for action, desire is central to the assumption of an end that in turn is the starting point of deliberation. I deliberate about how to achieve an objective I desire and need. But the content of prescription may be an action that will have to be performed by someone other than the deliberating subject. Does prescription stem from a deliberation taking place in the absence of desire? If so, is it then possible to deliberate about how to achieve an end that is not desired by the deliberating subject? It is only in part so. Prescription is the injunction of a conduct resulting from deliberative reasoning (to achieve x, you have to do y; anyone wishing to achieve x, will have to do y) that assumes an end desired by someone. People may therefore reason about how to achieve a goal without actually desiring it, i.e. they may deliberate to achieve ends desired by someone else, because they either are more competent or have the authority to guide other people's conduct. Aristotle arguably assumed that, in some cases, someone deliberates without desiring the specific end with a view to which they deliberate, but for the sake of a higher end. Such is the case with political deliberation, which forms the conclusion of the present inquiry in the fifth chapter. Political deliberation is the prescription of actions for achieving such ends as are not desired in themselves by the deliberating political authority, but are viewed as conducive to a higher end. To put it differently, political authority "desires" only the common good, i.e. the good functioning of the State, which is the architectonic and highest end, superordinate to all other ends. This means that ordinary political deliberation occurs within a hierarchically arranged system of competences: in this architectonic system, those who give prescriptions do so with a view to particular ends, of which they know the instrumental value.



While this first chapter has worked as a sort of introduction to the central arguments of the book, the second chapter (*Problems and Debates*) will survey the

state of scholarship about some issues of Aristotle's practical philosophy that are of major importance for the subject of the book. These issues are the following: deliberation as the most important form of practical and prescriptive reasoning; the so-called practical syllogism; the topic of the situational context as a modern interpretative key to Aristotle's practical philosophy as "particularistic" rather than "normativist"; the shaping of moral character. The second chapter is not a statement of the *status quaestionis*. It rather delineates the conceptual framework from which this study proceeds. My research hypothesis is that Aristotle fits into the tradition of the political thought of his predecessors but with a much more systematic approach: he makes prescription not merely the part of practical philosophy regarding the State but the most important function of practical reason. If prescription has not been matter of critical study as an issue in itself in Aristotelian studies, this is largely due to the fact that it is essentially intertwined with the above mentioned issues (deliberation, practical syllogism, normativism vs particularism, etc.), amongst which it has been somehow obscured. My methodological approach is accordingly based on the conviction that it is only from the modern interpretations of Aristotle's theories of deliberation, practical syllogism, etc., that the appropriate interpretative tools can be derived for dealing with a theme that is certainly present in Aristotle but on which there is as yet no significant body of critical literature.

The third chapter (*Deliberation and Prescription*) is an in-depth analysis of Aristotle's doctrine of deliberation and will reach the following main conclusions: as essentially based on the means-end relationship, deliberation has a hypothetical form and a problematic structure, i.e. it starts by assuming one of the alternatives making up a πρόβλημα, in the technical sense this word has in Aristotle's *Topics*. Therefore, deliberation is not the same as syllogism. Nonetheless, it may be "converted" into a syllogism, i.e. a deduction in which the attractiveness and correctness of the prescriptive conclusion derive from the dignity of the major term (the end) and the efficacy of the middle term respectively. However, since prescription is also the direction of *other people's* conduct, it has a special relationship with desire, ὁρεξις, the main cause of human action. If prescription is the result of deliberative reasoning, whose conclusion is meant to be the action of those who receive the prescription, not of those who have deliberated, then it is possible to deliberate about an end which is not an object of actual desire. And if there is a kind of practical syllogism representing the logical form into which deliberative reasoning, or a part of it, can be converted—a practical syllogism which is neither an explanation of the motive of an action, nor the link between deliberation and action—then the conclusion of a practical syllogism of this kind is a prescription or, more generally, a rule of conduct.



The fourth chapter (*Prescriptive Reason and Practical Wisdom*) clarifies the semantic and conceptual domain of prescription in Aristotle's psychology, ethics, and politics. It contains a discussion of the various meanings that the expression "prescriptive reason" (*epitaktikos logos*) can have, depending on whether we refer to practical reason as the guide of the desiring soul; the kind of reasoning by which we can persuade other people to adopt a certain conduct; the prescriptive role played by some sciences as compared to auxiliary and "serving" skills and activities; or, finally, the prescriptive function as the main feature of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). All this aims at emphasizing two key points. First, the widespread use of prescription-related terms in texts ranging from *Protrepticus* to *Politics*, as well as in contexts where the structure of deliberative reasoning is explicitly described or fairly clearly implied. Second, the strong logical connection that Aristotle establishes between different domains of his practical philosophy, when he describes a structure whose components are hierarchically ordered and work according to hierarchically organized ends and functions (the so-called *erga*). Whether he is discussing individual action and its psychological as well as ethical implications, or the good functioning of a political community, Aristotle relies on a logical procedure highlighting the causal relationship (be it a material or efficient cause) between a normative goal and the appropriate conduct for achieving it.

The distinction between prescriptive and auxiliary sciences and arts is of great relevance to the hierarchical order of political community, as will be explained in the final chapter (*Prescription and Architectonic Order*), where the political consequences of Aristotle's notion of prescription will be emphasized. Indeed, prescription is also an eminently political concept, closely connected with the legitimation of authority. The core of the fifth chapter is the celebrated distinction between action and production, which turns out to be key to the architectonic order of human ends and therefore to the hierarchical structure of society.

## Problems and Debates

### 1 The Relationship between Deliberation and the So-Called Practical Syllogism

Scholars have long debated about the relationship between deliberation (*Eth. eud.* 1226a27–1227a10, *Eth. nic.* 1112b1–1113a10 and 1142a21–1142b33) and deductive reasoning (i.e. the so-called practical syllogism, whose clearest examples can be found in *De motu*, 701a7–36, *De an.* 434a16–21, and *Eth. nic.* 1147a25–b10). Both kinds of reasoning seem to meet the requirements of practical reason, διάνοια πρακτική. Practical reason is evoked in a number of passages from *Ethics*,<sup>1</sup> *De anima*,<sup>2</sup> *Metaphysics*,<sup>3</sup> and *Politics*.<sup>4</sup> In *Eth. eud.* 1216b35–1217a10 it is significantly described as “architectonic” thinking. This means that practical reason does not freely speculate on any subject, but thinks with a view to an end, which represents the aim of all the stages of the reasoning process. First of all, then, thought must be trained to sift arguments according to the nature of the objects of reasoning, and to distinguish relevant arguments from non-relevant ones.<sup>5</sup> In Aristotle’s vocabulary, the word “architectonic” refers to a principle ordering a set of elements.<sup>6</sup> In the theory of action, practical reason is architectonic

1 *Eth. eud.* 1217a5–6; *Eth. nic.* 1139a26–27; 1139a35–b1.

2 *De an.* 433a18–19.

3 *Metaph.* 1025b25.

4 *Polit.* 1325b18.

5 “Now in every inquiry there is a difference between philosophic and unphilosophic argument; therefore we should not think even in political philosophy that the sort of consideration which not only makes the nature of the thing evident but also its cause is superfluous; for such consideration is in every inquiry the truly philosophic method. But this needs much caution. For there are some who, through thinking it to be the mark of a philosopher to make no arbitrary statement but always to give a reason, often unawares give reasons foreign to the subject and idle ... by which reasons even men experienced and able to act are trapped by those who neither have nor are capable of having practical and architectonic intelligence. And this happens to them from want of culture; for inability in regard to each matter to distinguish reasonings appropriate to the subject from those foreign to it is want of culture”. That *practical* reason is reason aimed at achieving an end, i.e. an object of desire, is claimed at *Eth. nic.* 1139a35–36 and *De an.* 433a18–19.

6 Cf. *Phys.* 194b1–4: “The arts which govern the matter and have knowledge are two, namely the art which uses the product and the art which directs the production of it. That is why the using art also is in a sense architectonic; but there is difference in that the latter knows the form, the former, as productive, knows the matter. For the helmsman knows and prescribes

because it is able to order its objects, ends and actions according to means-end and universal-particular relationships.

In *Eth. nic.* 1139a21–31 Aristotle claims that practical reason makes affirmative and negative statements just like theoretical reason, but does so with reference to objects of desire. The object of a “correct desire” (ὁρεξις ὁρθή) is the object of true statements made by practical reason.<sup>7</sup> Practical reason, then, differs from theoretical reason both by its objects, which are particular, changing and within our reach, and by its function, for practical thinking has to help fulfil a correct desire. Practical reason, however, does not seem to have its own forms of reasoning. The logical laws enabling us to draw a conclusion from some given premises or to verify a hypothesis in the practical domain are not different from those theoretical thinking applies in the scientific domain. It is no surprise, then, that in the *Ethics*—and in at least one case, *Eth. eud.* 1227a9–10, regarding deliberation—Aristotle refers to his *Analytics*<sup>8</sup> in order to stress the unity of the science of reasoning. Likewise, in *De motu animalium*<sup>9</sup> he draws a parallel between scientific deduction, whose conclusion is a scientific proposition, and the deduction causing human beings to move, whose conclusion is an action.

Deliberation and the so-called practical syllogism seem to have been clearly distinguished in Aristotle's texts only from the mid-1950s,<sup>10</sup> as a result of some pretty complex analyses where historiographical and theoretical interests are sometimes closely intertwined. In the scholarly literature of the XIX and early

---

what sort of form a helm should have, the other from what wood it should be made and by means of what operations”. From these words, we can draw an important consideration from a practical point of view. Productive arts are, within certain limits, architectonic and directive, as they know which materials are to be used in material products; “more” architectonic, or architectonic in strict sense, are the arts that know the end for the sake of which the products are produced, and the use which is to be done of them. So, productive art is directive just as regards the production process, for instance in finding the appropriate materials and using the proper tools, whereas the architectonic art is directive of the productive because it requires the latter to produce a product for a given purpose. On architectonic arts as those containing the principle of generation and movement, see *Metaph.* 1013a13–14. Cf. also *Eth. nic.* 1094a14, a27; 1141b23–25; *Polit.* 1282a3.

7 Cf. 1139a24. The notion of “correct desire” also appears in *De an.* 433a26–27.

8 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1217a17; 1222b37–38; 1227a9–10; *Eth. nic.* 1139b27.

9 701a9–15.

10 Comprehensive and very informative surveys on recent treatments of Aristotle's practical syllogism are provided by K. Corcilius, “Aristoteles' praktische Syllogismen in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts”, in C. Rapp-P. Brüllmann (eds.), “The Practical Syllogism”, *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy/Philosophiegeschichte und logische Analyse*, 11 (2008), 101–132; and H. Curzer, “Aristotle's Practical Syllogisms”, *The Philosophical Forum*, 46 (2015), 129–153.

xx centuries,<sup>11</sup> a formal distinction between deliberation and practical syllogism and a differentiation of their respective aims are not easily found. The passages where Aristotle discusses deliberation, cites instances of syllogism or explicitly uses syllogistic language, have long been interpreted as pertaining to the general domain of practical reasoning. There exist, however, two seminal studies that identify, against the backdrop of a basically unitary view, some peculiar characteristics of the two kinds of reasoning.

The first argues that:

Every action implies a sense of a general principle, and the applying of that principle to a particular case; or again, it implies desire for some end, coupled with perception of the means necessary for attaining the end. These two different ways of stating the practical syllogism are in reality coincident; for assuming that all action is for some end, the major premiss may be said always to contain the statement of an end. And again, any particular act, which is the application of a moral principle, may be said to be the means necessary to the realization of the principle.<sup>12</sup>

The second study argues that:

All action aims at something other than itself, and from its tendency to produce this it derives its value. Aristotle's ethics is definitely teleological; morality for him consists in doing certain actions not because we see them to be right in themselves but because we see to be such as will bring us nearer to the "good for man". This view, however, cannot really be reconciled with the distinction he draws between action or conduct, which is valuable in itself, and production, which derives its value from the "work"—the bridle, the statue ... The distinction is not without influence on his ethics, but in the main the category of means and end is that by which he interprets human action.<sup>13</sup>

On the first interpretation, Aristotle's practical reasoning is practical syllogism, which can be regarded as either the application of a general normative principle or the kind of reasoning that identifies a certain action as the best means

11 Cf. especially J. Burnet, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, Methuen, London 1900, XLIII; L.H.G. Greenwood, *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics Book Six*, CUP, Cambridge 1909, 50f.

12 A. Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle illustrated with Essays and Notes*, vol. I, London 1857, 214.

13 W.D. Ross, *Aristotle. With a New Introduction by John L. Ackrill*, Routledge, London 1995<sup>6</sup> (1923<sup>1</sup>), 198.

to achieve the end. These are not two distinct kinds of reasoning, but two ways to analyze the causes of human action according to whether it shows the presence of a desire or the observance of a rule. On the other hand, Ross views deliberation primarily as the search for the means to an end. Although it lacks a deductive form, deliberation can be regarded as a syllogism<sup>14</sup> where the major premise posits the end and the minor premise and the conclusion identify the means to it. Two things are worth noting. In the first author quoted, there begins to emerge a critical difference between the notion of *end* and that of *norm*, which paves the way to a more definite distinction, on the part of later scholarship, between deliberation and practical syllogism. In the second author, there appears a clear distinction between action and production. Unlike the former, this latter distinction is well attested in Aristotle's texts. It is a basic component of Aristotle's classification of sciences<sup>15</sup> and it plays a significant role in other important contexts.

Later interpreters, though agreeing the substantial identity of deliberation and practical syllogism, have highlighted various problems.<sup>16</sup> Do deliberation and practical syllogism, both regarding actions, differ in form and procedure?<sup>17</sup> And as specifically for the so-called practical syllogism, does it have a mere *explanatory* function, enabling us to explain what prompts or prompted someone to perform a particular action? Or does it also have a *prescriptive* function, enabling us to understand what we have to do at a certain point in time, as Aristotle's description of deliberation would suggest? If the practical syllogism is an explanatory tool, as in Aristotle's example in *An. post.* II 11, it aims to answer the question about *why* (i.e. *with what aim*) someone performed or is performing an action. On the other hand, if practical reasoning is the deliberation about what to do in the future, then practical syllogism, as identical or corresponding to deliberation, should also have a prescriptive function as well, helping us make our decisions and directing our conduct.

Another problem is the way Aristotle understands the conclusion of practical syllogisms in *De anima*, 434a16–21 and in *De motu animalium*, 701a7–36. Is

14 W.D. Ross, *Aristotle. A complete exposition*, cit., 212–213.

15 Cf. *Top.* 145a15–16; *Metaph.* 1025b25–26, cit.; 1026b4–5; 1064a10–11; a16, etc.

16 Cf. particularly H.H. Joachim, *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics. A Commentary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1951, 208–210, and T. Ando, *Aristotle's Theory of Practical Cognition. With a Preface by W.D. Ross*, Nijhoff, The Hague 1965<sup>2</sup>, 266–284.

17 Cf. T. Ando, op. cit., 284: "And if one requires us to distinguish deliberation from syllogism, we shall say that deliberation is the searching for the means, while syllogism is the justification of it. The order of thinking is reversed. We might also say that deliberation is constructive, while syllogism is reflective".

the συμπεράσμα here a *type of action*, i.e. a rule to be followed in certain circumstances (we drink when we are thirsty, we wear a cloak when we need to protect ourselves from the cold, etc.)? Or is it a particular, individual, and contingent action (*I* have to drink, *now*)? And is the conclusion of the practical syllogism the proposition about an action or is it the action itself, as Aristotle seems to claim in both *De motu*, 701a12–13 (τὸ συμπεράσμα γίνεται ἢ πράξις) and *Eth. nic.* 1147a31 (... ἄμα τοῦτο καὶ πράττειν)? If the conclusion of the practical syllogism is a particular and contingent action, not a type of action, it would seem that it cannot be deduced from the premises in the way a habitual rule of conduct can—which is also the case if the conclusion is not a proposition about the action, but the action itself.

This nexus of problems was discussed by G.E.M. Anscombe; her understanding of Aristotle's theory of practical syllogism and its connections with action and deliberation exerted a profound influence on later interpretations of Aristotle's practical philosophy. Anscombe apparently refuses to distinguish practical syllogism from deliberation. She describes the former as the kind of reasoning that reveals the end of the action (or intention) and provides an answer to the question "why are you doing this?". Practical syllogism, then, is the kind of reasoning in which the major premise describes a certain object as worth choosing or, more precisely, desirable:

Aristotle would seem to have held that every action done by a rational agent was capable of having its grounds set forth up to a premise containing a desirability characterization; and as we have seen, there is a reasonable ground for this view, where there is a calculation of means to ends, or of ways of doing what one wants to do.<sup>18</sup>

Anscombe is probably thinking of such Aristotelian passages as *De motu*, 701b31 or *Eth. nic.* 1147a6, where the premises refer to the desire for a certain object or the benefit (συμφέρον) that one can get from something. Alternatively, she might have been thinking of *Eth. nic.* 1144a31–32, where Aristotle argues that syllogisms about actions have as their principle and major extreme the end (τέλος) and the best (ἄριστον), whatever the object of which "end" and "best" are predicated. Desirability turns any object into a wanted object, i.e. an end, and it is, in general terms, the answer to the *why* question.<sup>19</sup> In Anscombe's

<sup>18</sup> *Intention*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA)-London, 1963<sup>2</sup>, ch. 38, 72–73.

<sup>19</sup> It is significant that, among the various cases of practical syllogisms illustrated by Aristotle, Anscombe considers the famous example at *Eth. nic.* 1141b18, about the preferability of light meats because of their digestibility, as a case of practical syllogism which does

view, the assertion that an object is desirable should put an end to the series of questions about the reason for a certain action ("Let us ... consider an actual case where a desirability characterisation gives a final answer to the series of 'What for?', ch. 38, p. 72). Apparently, the idea that there can be a *series* of questions about the goal of an action is based on the view that practical syllogism and deliberation coincide. What makes possible the series of *why* questions is the fact that an end is often achieved through a sequence, or series, of actions, each of which is conducive to the next, until the desired goal is reached. The view that practical syllogism and deliberation coincide, however, is far from unproblematic. Before arguing that for Aristotle an action can be accounted for by referring to the desirability of its objective, i.e. the notion of the end, Anscombe raises two issues. First, a practical syllogism deduces an action, but does not prompt us to perform it. In *Eth. nic.* 1147a5–6 Aristotle gives an example ("dry food is good for every man", and "I am a man", or "such and such food is dry", etc.) in order to demonstrate that we may fail to act in accord with the universal premise if we lack the particular premise. While discussing this passage, Anscombe claims that the possible conclusion 'this food suits me' (cf. p. 58)—which Aristotle, however, does not draw—does not prompt us to act because of the gap between logical and practical necessity. For a syllogism "has [...] the disadvantage, so far its being practical is concerned, that though the conclusion is necessitated, nothing seems to follow about doing anything" (p. 59). The second problem has a more general character. If a syllogism fails to prompt us to act, its conclusion being not an action but just a proposition about an action with no practical consequences, then the "fault" lies in part with Aristotle, for he distinguished practical from scientific reasoning only with regard to its matter, not its form:

... we may accept from Aristotle that practical reasoning is essentially concerned with 'what is capable of turning out variously', without thinking that this subject matter is enough to make reasoning about it practical. There is a difference of form between reasoning leading to action and rea-

---

not reveal what she calls "desirability-characterisation", cf. p. 72: "Here the description 'digestible and wholesome' might seem not be a pure desirability-characterisation. But since wholesome means good for the health, and health is by definition the good general state of the physical organism, the characterisation is adequate for a proper first premise and does not need to be eked out by, say 'health is a human good' (a tautology)". Actually, the text in question is one of those that explain the *efficacy* of a particular rule of conduct, rather than revealing its end. The efficacy of a particular rule of conduct can be found out only in the light of the (already known) end.

soning for the truth of a conclusion. Aristotle however liked to stress the similarity between the kinds of reasoning, saying that what 'happens' is the same in both.

p. 60

It seems that Anscombe is here introducing the view that practical reasoning should take on a form other than that of demonstrative reasoning (and therefore, of syllogism). According to this view, an explanatory argument should explain an action by searching for its reason and finding it out in the end of the action ("Is that man walking for digesting his meal, or for stretching his legs, or for something else?") The action is the *known* starting point of such an explanatory inquiry, which concludes with what Anscombe calls "desirability characterization". Yet if practical reasoning is to be prescriptive, it has to start from the desirable object, the end, which is the known element; what has to be found out is the means, i.e. the action, enabling us to achieve the end. This difference in the way explanation and prescription unfold does not necessarily entail the separation between practical syllogism and deliberation but probably paves the way for it.

A significant contribution to this debate was given by G. von Wright.<sup>20</sup> His interpretation deserves to be considered here also with respect to prescription meant as regulation of other people's conduct. Von Wright regards Aristotle's rare remarks about the practical syllogism as crucial for his analysis of practical inference and the accompanying notion of *practical* necessity. Practical necessity is basically distinct from logical necessity, and explains how we get from deliberation to action. Starting from *Eth. nic.* 1147a25–31 and *De motu*, 701a12–13, von Wright argues that for Aristotle practical inference is a kind of reasoning in which an individual act is subsumed under a general practical norm.<sup>21</sup> He goes on to observe that this kind of reasoning does not perfectly coincide with the one that reflects on the means to an end. Nonetheless, in Aristotle's view, reasoning is practical if it searches for the action to perform in order to achieve an end:

20 G.H. von Wright, "Practical Inference", *The Philosophical Review*, 72 (1963), 159–179. On the connection between "practical inference", which von Wright means as a syllogism, and deliberative reasoning based on means-end relation, see also the same author's *Explanation and Understanding*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York-London 1971, 96 f.

21 "Practical Inference", cit. 159: "Aristotle seems throughout to be thinking of practical inference in terms of the subsumption of an individual act under a general rule of action by the intermediary of a particular fact-stating premise".



The type of argument which we shall here be primarily studying is concerned with (necessary) means to an end. Although the notions of means and end are prominent in Aristotle's ethics, Aristotle seems not to have had this type of argument in mind when speaking of practical syllogisms. Yet the chief peculiarity [...] of Aristotle's practical syllogisms—namely, their relation to *action*—is characteristic also of practical inference of the type which is here studied.

p. 160

When talking about the type of argument that “is concerned with means to an end” von Wright is plausibly remembering Aristotle's description of deliberation. He seems to have Aristotle think that practical syllogism, as a deduction of an act from a general norm, is both different from and contiguous to the deliberative search for the appropriate means to an end. Deliberation and practical syllogism are both aimed at an action or a decision; but practical syllogism is a deduction whose validity rests on the truth of its premises. In addition, it has to produce a practical conclusion, i.e. a conclusion that is prescriptive, not just true.<sup>22</sup> The difficulty that a practical inference has to face, particularly in the form of a practical syllogism, is to show the *practical* necessity of its conclusion, i.e. that it is necessary to act *as a result of* the inference. Von Wright offers a number of models of practical inference where one of the two premises always expresses a desire or a need (“I want/one wants”). His solution is to distinguish practical inferences according to whether the subject of the premise expressing a desire or a need is in the first or third person. Only in the first case do we have an inference characterized by practical necessity. In the second case, we (just) have a logical necessity, not a cause of action. The difference between inferences in the first and third person determines what kind of necessity the deduction has. If the inference is in the first person, volition and knowledge of what is necessary to satisfy volition are the acts of the same subject, i.e. the deliberating subject.<sup>23</sup> If the inference is in the third person, the necessity of the deduction is logical, and does not coincide with the necessity to act.<sup>24</sup> A practical syllogism can be said to have practical and subjective necessity when Aristotle describes its conclusion as an act:

---

22 Cf. p. 161, where von Wright advances the main objection he supposes would be raised by logicians who consider Aristotelian syllogism as a logically conclusive argument rather than a prescriptive argument: “Some of them would perhaps support their view with the following argument: The two premises of the inference are *descriptive*. They state what is the case. The conclusion, however, is *normative or prescriptive*”.

23 *Art. cit.*, 165.

24 *Art. cit.*, 166.

The logical peculiarity, noted by Aristotle, that practical inference leads to action is thus not a characteristic of such inference in the third person. This peculiarity ... belongs to the first-person case. One could mark the fundamental difference between the two cases by saying that only practical inference in the first person is truly “practical”, whereas the argument in the third person is actually “theoretical”.

p. 165

I shall call the determination of action through a practical inference in the first person *subjective* practical necessity. It seems to me that Aristotle must have been thinking of this peculiar kind of necessitation when he insisted that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is an act.

p. 166

A third-person inference is the form in which deliberative reasoning is expressed. The premises of such an inference are propositions showing a necessary causal relationship between a certain conduct and an end. In other words, a third-person practical inference is the logical form of a regulative reasoning stating that, unless condition *x* is satisfied, end *y* will not be achieved. It is, therefore, a conclusive logical deduction, which accounts for specific rules of conduct and sanctions a variety of duties and obligations. These are aptly called *derivative* by von Wright, for they are prescriptive in that they help enforce a certain norm, as the following example shows: it is *A*'s duty to make the hut habitable; unless *A* heats the hut, he cannot make it habitable; therefore, it is *A*'s duty to heat the hut.<sup>25</sup> So, we can also say that in von Wright's view deliberation, as described in the *Ethics*, is a third-person/objective inference revealing, as a general rule, what *everyone* should do in order to get an end; the practical syllogism of the *De motu* is a first-person/subjective inference revealing the action a *single subject* should perform in given, contingent circumstances.

In addition to subjective and objective inferences, there is a third kind of inferences. These latter involve two subjects, one deliberating about what must

---

25 A.W. Price, *Virtue and Reason in Plato and Aristotle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2011, 236–246, seems to raise a similar issue when he claims that *De anima*'s syllogistic premises (at 434a18–19: “Such-and-such a man must do such-and-such a thing. I am such-and-such a man, and this is such-and-such a thing”) do not give account of the necessity by which a particular line of conduct is to be pursued to get a desired end, cf. his remarks at p. 242: “Though he [the agent] may desire that every man of that kind perform an act of that kind, this can hardly be an *end* of his. It may indeed be his present end that *he* do a thing of that kind; but then how do we explain the universality and necessity of the first premise?”.

be done in order to achieve the desired end, and one performing what the other has deliberated, according to the following scheme: *A* wants to attain *x*; unless *A* makes *B* do *y*, he will not attain *x*; therefore, *A* must make *B* do *y*.<sup>26</sup> I will leave aside the logical implications of this third kind of inferences, which need not concern us here. It is worth noting, however, that it shows quite well the character of prescription as regulating other people's conduct. Although it is not discussed by von Wright with respect to Aristotle's theory of practical syllogism and deliberation, it corresponds to the kind of prescriptive reasoning that we can find in a number of Aristotelian passages.

My survey of these scholarly contributions is far from doing them justice. However, I hope it offers a sufficient sample of the most debated topics in discussions of Aristotle's idea of practical reasoning. Among these topics, the most relevant to our present inquiry is the role that Aristotle views practical syllogism as playing. If practical syllogism is an explanatory argument, then its role cannot be to give a practical norm or to help one choose a certain course of conduct. In other words, the practical syllogism can hardly coincide with deliberative thinking, which, starting from the notion of the end, finds out the means to it. On the other hand, deliberation is certainly the kind of reasoning that Aristotle regards as having a prescriptive function: if conduct *x* turns out to be the right way to achieve end *y*, it follows that it is appropriate to do *x* if we desire *y*.

Another problematic and hotly debated aspect, as we have seen, is the view that the conclusion of a practical syllogism coincides with an action. This may be taken at face value: the model of syllogism as illustrated in the seventh chapter of *De motu animalium* and in the seventh book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>27</sup> may be considered as practical syllogism *tout court*. But if this is so, then, as Aristotle himself points out, it is impossible to account for the case of someone failing to act in accord with the conclusion of the syllogism. More importantly, it is impossible to account for the fact that a logically inferred practical proposition can lay down a general rule, rather than order an immediate action. To put it differently: we have to ask whether Aristotle, in addition to an explanatory practical syllogism accounting for a course of conduct *ex post facto*, and a practical syllogism whose conclusion is action, identified a normative kind of syllogism aimed at sanctioning rules. If this is the case, we have to ask what the relationship would be between this third kind of practical syllogism and deliberation.

26 *Art. cit.*, 162, 172–176.

27 *Eth. nic.* 1147a25 ff.

## 2 The Relationship between the Logical Form of Deliberation and Practical Syllogism

The unitarian view, i.e. the idea that there is no substantial difference between deliberative reasoning and practical syllogism, was called into question by others who regarded the two kinds of reasoning as having either a different function or a different formal structure. D.J. Allan's celebrated 1955 study, *The Practical Syllogism*,<sup>28</sup> played a crucial role in starting a new scholarly trend. First, Allan elaborates on a topic mentioned in Grant's above-cited claim about the distinction between norm and end. Starting from the well-known differentiation in *De motu animalium* between a premise about the "good" and a premise about the "possible",<sup>29</sup> Allan describes Aristotle as distinguishing syllogisms whose major premise is an end from normative syllogisms.<sup>30</sup> This interpretation has been generally rejected in favour of the view that Aristotle's claim in the *De motu* passage is that every practical syllogism has a major premise about the "good" and a minor premise about the "possible". Nonetheless, Allan's distinction between two types of reasoning—one applying a general norm to particular cases and one searching for the practical way to achieve the end—has exerted a considerable influence over later scholars who considered deliberation and practical syllogism to be two independent kinds of reasoning. Second, Allan emphasizes the difference between practical syllogism as an explanation of the psychological and intellectual unfolding of an action<sup>31</sup> and of its moral value,<sup>32</sup> and prescriptive (or at least persuasive) practical reasoning, which Aristotle allegedly took over from Plato's *Phaedrus*.<sup>33</sup>

The view that deliberation and practical syllogism are distinct is taken up by most of later scholars. P. Aubenque<sup>34</sup> argues that deliberation is about the

28 "The Practical Syllogism", in *Autour d'Aristote. Recueil d'études de philosophie ancienne et médiévale offert à Monseigneur A. Mansion*, Publications Universitaires de Louvain, Louvain 1955, 325–340.

29 *De mot. anim.* 701a23–25.

30 *Art. cit.*, 330 f. As I hope to show, a distinction between "norm" and "end" cannot be found in Aristotle's conception of practical reasoning and theory of action. Aristotle's key notion in theory of action is that of end, *telos*. The idea of *telos*, or "what for the sake of which", also qualifies what we may call "normativity", in that the achievement of a certain *telos* may be seen as a regulative criterion of conduct.

31 *Art. cit.*, 332.

32 *Art. cit.*, 338.

33 Allan, *art. cit.* 331 f., draws attention to a possible derivation of the text of *De an.* 434a16 from *Phaedr.* 271e–272a, where Plato argues that a good orator must know the general rule and the individual nature of his interlocutor, to which the rule applies.

34 *La prudence chez Aristote*, PUF, Paris 1963, 108–141, esp. 139.

*fin-moyens* relationship, whereas syllogism is about the *universel-particulier* relationship. He emphasizes the preliminary, almost propaedeutic, character of the deliberation about the material circumstances that supply the terms of the minor premise.<sup>35</sup> According to Aubenque, deliberation and practical syllogism are two different kinds of reasoning occurring at different moments. In addition, it is deliberation that makes practical syllogism possible. W.F.R. Hardie<sup>36</sup> describes practical syllogism as the application of a norm to a particular and contingent situation, not a search for the means to an end. Accordingly, it has to be considered not as the form of every practical reasoning, still less as the logical form of deliberation, but rather as a part of deliberative reasoning. Despite drawing some precise distinctions,<sup>37</sup> Hardie refrains from describing norms and ends as the principles of two different modes of practical reasoning. He concludes his discussion by taking a basically unitarian view but also subscribing to Allan's chief idea<sup>38</sup> that practical syllogism is the logical translation of the psychological unfolding of an action:

To syllogize in action is to apply a rule of the form 'such and such a man should act in such and such ways' with a view to realizing an end and ultimately, no doubt, the supreme end, happiness. But I am not implying that all the rules which Aristotle might admit as major premisses are in fact rules which prescribe means to ends.

p. 254

A definite distinction between practical syllogism and deliberation is explicitly proposed by J.M. Cooper.<sup>39</sup> He accepts Allan's differentiation between end and norm and, more importantly, distinguishes a *particular action*, i.e. the outcome

35 Op. cit. 139 note 3: "Le syllogisme ... doit être précédé d'une délibération ou analyse ... qui n'a rien d'un syllogisme".

36 *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1980<sup>2</sup>, 165–167, esp. 240–257.

37 Also in the case of *De motu*, 701a18–23, in which nearly all the interpreters see a syllogistic formulation, Hardie writes: "In the last part of this example the analytic regress from the end, the existence of a cloak, to the means, something I can do here and now, recalls the account of deliberation in *EN* III. 3 [...] There is no suggestion that this phase of practical thinking can or should be expressed in the form of a series of syllogisms" (p. 247).

38 Nonetheless, Hardie contests Allan's interpretation according to which syllogism is not "even part of a process of deliberating or discovering what to do". Since Aristotle, Hardie concludes (p. 249), often connects syllogism and deliberation, there is no reason to deny that syllogism may be a part of an articulated deliberative reasoning.

39 *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1975, repr. Hackett Publ., Indianapolis-Cambridge (MA) 1986, 22–46.

of practical syllogism, from *a class of actions*, i.e. the outcome of deliberation. A class of actions is the object of a choice with regard to which “it is a matter of indifference ... whether the time for implementing the decision is the time at which it is made, or somewhat later on”.<sup>40</sup> Hence, deliberation is a kind of reasoning concluding that a certain line of conduct is good. It is syllogism, however, starting from the conclusion of a deliberation and operating by means of perception, that has an action as its conclusion. Practical syllogism is the link between deliberation and action, it is separate from deliberation and comes in after it. Deliberation, on the other hand, never determines when we should act:

Aristotle does, I think, maintain that deliberation ceases once such a specific decision is reached, so that the practical syllogism, which is always subsequent to such decisions, cannot be a stage in the process of deliberation ... The practical syllogism, which has an action referred to as “doing *this* (to *this*)” as its conclusion, is not a required last stage in deliberation.<sup>41</sup>

... the *last step in deliberation* is the discovery of a specific thing on which the agent can begin to act in pursuit of his end. That is to say, the conclusion of the process of deliberation is reached when one has something of the form of “Eating chicken is a way of achieving my end.” And since the practical syllogism, whatever its function may be, only comes in after this point is reached, it is therefore no part of the reasoning that leads to a decision what to do. This decision is already completed before the syllogism can get under way.<sup>42</sup>

Cooper’s remarks about the *time* at which we put our decision into practice are extremely interesting. His distinction between deliberation—whose conclusion is a decision about a certain *type of action*—and syllogism—which has as its conclusion a *particular* action and always comes in after deliberation—implies that, in principle, we might deliberate without our deliberation being followed by a syllogism. In other words, we might deliberate in order to determine the best way to achieve an end, but feel no need to act after making the decision. According to Cooper’s interpretation, the last step of deliberation might be construed as a rule, that is, a prescriptive proposition about what to do when the situation requires the performance of a particular act.

---

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit., 23.

<sup>41</sup> Op. cit., 33.

<sup>42</sup> Op. cit., 38.

Cooper's interpretation, though not entirely accepted, has exerted a considerable influence. In her analysis of practical syllogism and its relationship with deliberation, M. Nussbaum discusses the view that Aristotle's practical philosophy should be regarded as "deductivist", i.e. as a system of norms whose value derives from their depending on universal and necessary laws. Since Nussbaum rejects this view, her discussion of practical syllogism aims chiefly to clarify Aristotle's concept of norm. She disputes<sup>43</sup> the idea that deliberation and practical syllogism are fundamentally different because there is no reason why syllogism cannot be useful for "illuminating" the course of deliberative reasoning.<sup>44</sup> Despite their divergences, Nussbaum's analysis comes to resemble Cooper's when she points out that the outcome of practical reasoning can fail to coincide with the *time* at which action takes place:

... there really seem to be two logically distinct cognitive activities that Aristotle somewhat misleadingly subsumes under the general rubric of the "minor premise", or the premise "pertaining to the possible." First, the belief about what must be done if the goal is to be realized. Second, the perception that one can do that act now. A calculation of the first sort ("If I am to get a cloak, there must be this") might be completed before the time when action is possible ... The conclusion is still action, but one acts only when the appropriate time arrives, and only if one's desire and belief are still fully active when that time comes.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from the fact that Nussbaum regards the conclusion of some practical syllogisms as having the preliminary character that Cooper ascribes only to decision, her remarks confirm the suggestion, already derived from Cooper, that deliberative practical reasoning, whatever its logical form, can be viewed as concluded even if its conclusion is not followed by the performance of the deliberated action. This is particularly interesting for the present inquiry in that, as I hope to show, prescription seems to be the outcome of a practical reasoning whose primary goal is establishing a more or less general rule of conduct, not only performing a particular action. Yet there are puzzles. First, if practical reasoning takes on the form of a syllogism, then failure to put its conclusion into practice is at odds with what Aristotle claims in those *De motu*

43 *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium. Text with Translation, Commentary, and Interpretative Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1978, 190.

44 *Op. cit.*, 207.

45 *Op. cit.*, 191–192.

passages where the conclusion of a syllogism seems to coincide with action.<sup>46</sup> Most importantly, failure to put into practice the conclusion of practical reasoning cannot easily be accounted for, if practical reasoning has started from an *actual* desire. We should then advance the hypothesis that for Aristotle we may deliberate about the means to a certain end, and even to arrive at a choice, without being motivated by an actual desire. We may reason, for instance, about the most appropriate or available solution of a practical problem, *if* such a problem occurred; or, we may deliberate about the best way to meet *other's people* needs and desires.

Other scholars take more nuanced views of the correspondence between deliberation and syllogism. Kenny<sup>47</sup> holds that explanation of an action by reference to its end and deliberation about the means for achieving an end are two forms of practical reasoning. Between them there are differences, which however should not be emphasized. In both cases, practical reasoning starts from the desire for a good and the perception of a state of affairs that either determines or limits or thwarts the achievement of the desired good. Natali<sup>48</sup> takes a pretty nuanced view as well. He claims that deliberation should not to be identified with practical syllogism; it is rather the search for the middle term of a syllogism. He also points out that it would be wrong to neglect Aristotle's frequent use of syllogistic language in the passages about deliberation. This usage confirms that deliberation is the search for a middle term transmitting the desirability of the end to anything useful for achieving the end.<sup>49</sup> Unlike other interpreters, Natali points out that we can perform a kind of *apparently* practical reasoning, and formulate the two premises of a syllogism, even in the absence of an actual desire:

If there is no transmission of desire, the reasoning is not practical. Indeed ... we can reason coolly about another man's choices and determine which action is preferable for a man in his position. But in this case the reasoning does not result in any action, and our limbs do not move, or abstain from moving, when they ought to.<sup>50</sup>

---

46 Cf. *De motu*, 701a15–17; a22; a30–33. In these passages, Aristotle seems to claim that the conclusion of a practical reasoning is action “at once” (εὐθύς). As Nussbaum and other scholars have correctly pointed out, however, not all the *De motu* examples of practical syllogism can be interpreted as having *sic et simpliciter* an action as their conclusion.

47 *Aristotle's Theory of the Will*, Duckworth, London 1979, 111–124.

48 *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, transl. by G. Parks, State University of New York Press, Albany 2001, 76.

49 Op. cit., 66–67.

50 Op. cit., 92.



Although some scholars have reverted to the idea that deliberation and practical syllogism basically coincide,<sup>51</sup> new arguments have been recently adduced in support of the thesis that deliberation and practical syllogism are different. The heuristic and stochastic character of deliberation as well as its “regressive” aspect (i.e. the fact that it moves backwards from a remote end until it comes to the first act within the deliberating subject’s reach) have been contrasted with the deductive nature of practical syllogism.<sup>52</sup> An in-depth reconsideration of the entire problem has been offered by K. Corcilius.<sup>53</sup> One of the chief merits of his analysis is the identification of the three domains where practical reasoning is necessary, i.e. deliberation; explanation of the origin of animal movement; *ex post facto* teleological explanation of human action. Deliberation is a search for the means to an end, by getting to know and taking into account certain causal relations, whereas *ex post* explanation is a search for the final cause, hence for the motives of action. The syllogism described in the seventh chapter of *De motu* must be distinguished from these two kinds of reasoning. Since in that passage Aristotle is trying to account for animal movement, he cannot be discussing reasoning by a deliberating subject or teleological explanation; rather, he is offering a reconstruction of the causes of animal movement based on an analogy with causal deduction. Corcilius distinguishes two variants of practical syllogism, which other scholars have considered as identical: practical syllogism as the explanation for the motive of an action, and the practical syllogism as illustrated in *De motu*, which reflects the psychological unfolding of animal movement. He sums up his arguments against the idea that deliberation and practical syllogism coincide in a scheme comparing their respective character-

51 Cf. A. Mele, “The Practical Syllogism and Deliberation in Aristotle’s Causal Theory of Action”, *The New Scholasticism*, 55 (1981), 281–316: syllogism is the logical form of deliberation. In Mele’s view, deliberation is an inquiry of a logical-cognitive type, whose meaning is made clear by Aristotle’s discussion of reminiscence (*De memoria*, 453a15–19). Reminiscence sometimes occurs in the absence of a conscious logical or imaginative reconstruction of the relationships which enable us to call something to mind (such is the case e.g. when we recall the sequence of the letters of the alphabet). Deliberation takes place exactly in the same way. Sometimes a deliberating subject comes to make a choice without performing a thorough deliberation, but just by formulating a practical syllogism. See also F.D. Miller, “Aristotle on Rationality in Action”, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 37 (1984), 499–520, and, for more recent positions, *infra*.

52 Cf. M. Crubellier, “Le “syllogisme pratique” ou comment la pensée meut le corps”, in A. Laks-M. Rashed (eds.), *Aristote et le mouvement des animaux. Dix études sur le De motu animalium*, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, Villeneuve d’Ascq 2004, 9–26, esp. 20–23.

53 “Praktische Syllogismen bei Aristoteles”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 90 (2008), 247–297. See also K. Corcilius, “Two Jobs for Aristotle’s Practical Syllogism?”, in C. Rapp-P. Brüllmann (eds.), *The Practical Syllogism*, cit., 163–184.

istics,<sup>54</sup> and thereby shows that deliberation is not a deduction but a heuristic procedure, for it has to find the solution of a problem, not an explanation for something. However, it ends not with action, but choice, or decision, which is alien to action and precedes it. Corcilius' reconstruction, which takes up some aspects of Cooper's analysis, deserves serious consideration, and his reference to the structural difference between hypothetical reasoning (deliberation) and deduction (syllogism) will turn out to be very useful for the present study. However, the issue remains unsettled, as is shown by a number of recent studies.<sup>55</sup>

The major problem about the relationship between practical syllogism and deliberation, as it emerges from the previous paragraphs, seems to me to be the following. On the one hand, those who emphasize the difference in their formal structure are right in claiming that, if syllogism is a kind of explanatory reasoning aimed at answering the *why* or *what for* question, then it is practical only in that it concerns human action. In other words, such a reasoning explains *why* an action or a type of action has been or should be performed, not *how* a certain goal might be achieved. Only deliberation answers to the *how* question and, therefore, must be distinguished from the practical syllogism. On the other hand, as some scholars have observed, if Aristotle had held that practical syllogism and deliberation have not only a different logical form but also a distinct aim, and if he had meant practical syllogism as a reasoning that takes place only *after* deliberation, probably he would have not used syllogistic language while describing the deliberative process. The hypothesis we have to verify is, then, whether Aristotle has conceived of a type of practical syllogism that, explaining why a given action is the appropriate means to an end, contributes in some way to the choice of that action.

### 3 The Object of Deliberation

Scholars have debated about the object of deliberation as well. At first blush, Aristotle's stance seems to be fairly clear: deliberation is a reasoning about what is useful for achieving an end: τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος.<sup>56</sup> The end, therefore, is the necessary starting-point of deliberation, not its object. Hence, the decision, or

54 "Two Jobs", cit., 174.

55 See for instance, P. Gottlieb, "The Ethical Syllogism", *ibidem*, 197–212; S. Bobzien, "Choice and Moral Responsibility (NE iii 1–5)", in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2014, 81–109, esp. 89; J. Moss, "Right Reason in Plato and Aristotle: On the Meaning of *Logos*", *Phronesis*, 59 (2014), 181–230, esp. 213.

56 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 112b27–34, 113b4, *Eth. eud.* 1226b16, 1227a11, etc.

rather the choice (προαίρεσις),<sup>57</sup> that forms the conclusion of a deliberation is the choice of what has been deliberated because it has turned out to be useful for achieving the end. Deliberation is a “calculating” (λογιστική) operation by which we try to understand what actions have a direct or indirect relationship with the end, e.g. what actions have a certain end as their effect, or produce the best conditions for achieving the end. Aristotle’s remark that not only deliberation, but also choice is of the “means” to an end,<sup>58</sup> rather than of the end itself, is significant: since choice is deliberated desire,<sup>59</sup> it shows that the desire for a certain end is transmitted to the conditions useful for achieving that end. These conditions, then, become desirable, though in derivative sense and not by themselves. The good deliberator recognizes what means are good and, also, what are better and the best under given circumstances. We may say that since doctors, according to the well-known example,<sup>60</sup> do not deliberate whether but *how* they should treat their patients, in a sense they do not choose to treat them, but rather to treat them in a certain way—the way they think best. People do not choose to be happy and feel fine, but the best way to achieve happiness.<sup>61</sup> If in order to be happy we have to choose certain actions, we will choose not only to become rich and have good social connections, but also, and above all, to act in a just, courageous and moderate way, since moral virtue is an essential, if not exclusive, condition for the happiness of a good citizen.<sup>62</sup> A similar case is that of lawgivers,<sup>63</sup> whose ultimate end is not the good law but the good of the State, with a view to which they will issue and enforce good laws.

57 Although “decision” is a correct translation of προαίρεσις (though cf. *LSJ* s. vv. προαίρεσις and προαιρούμαι), I prefer “choice” because it seems to me that this word is a more appropriate rendering of the idea of motivation and, in a sense, “attraction” exerted on us by the ultimate term of deliberation; whereas “decision” stresses the intellectual and critical nature of the act. We should remember that Aristotle himself defines προαίρεσις as a deliberate *desire*.

58 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1227b34–39: “If, then, of all correctness either reason or virtue is the cause, if reason is not the cause, then the end (but not the things contributing to it) must owe its rightness to virtue. But the end is the object of the action; for all choice is of something and for the sake of some object. The object, then, is the mean, and virtue is the cause of this by choosing the object. Still choice is not of this but of the things done for the sake of this”; *Eth. nic.* 1112b26–27: “Volition relates rather to the end, choice to what contributes to the end”.

59 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 113a10–11; 1139a23.

60 *Eth. nic.* 112b13 ff.

61 *Eth. eud.* 1226a10.

62 Cf. e.g. *Eth. eud.* 1214a31; 1215a15; *Eth. nic.* 1101a14–15; 1102a5–17; 1117b10–15; 1144a1–8.

63 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1099b29–32; 1129b14–19: “The laws in their enactments on all subjects aim at the common advantage either of all or of the best or of those who hold power, or some-

These considerations have suggested that, virtuous actions being appropriate means to happiness, they might appear instrumental rather than worth doing in themselves. A purely instrumental reading of Aristotle's theory of deliberation and an interpretation of the expression τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος as indicating the "means" to an end would lead to an instrumental view of moral virtue. Yet such a view turns out to be wrong if we look at the passages where Aristotle stresses the superiority of moral actions which are chosen for themselves and are themselves the object of volition.<sup>64</sup>

The question as to whether the object of deliberation is to be understood in a purely instrumental sense is linked with a more wide-ranging issue, i.e. how, in Aristotle's view, practical reason determines the moral good and the goal of life. Is practical reason just "calculating" and aimed at achieving immediate ends, or does it rather have to use the methods of theoretical reason, e.g. analysis and definition, to help us identify the practical good? If, as is plausible, reason helps us to identify the goal of life and, most importantly, the rules of conduct, is there, beyond deliberative reasoning, another kind of practical reasoning that can give us regulative norms and principles for action? Or does deliberation itself, while searching for the means to the end, determine and specify its nature, so that the "means" are not just instruments alien to the end (as drugs and marble are extrinsic means to health and the statue) but basic components of it (as moral virtue is the condition to and the component of the happy life)?

A major proponent of the view that deliberation is also about the end is D. Wiggins,<sup>65</sup> who takes as his starting point Allan's arguments. As we have seen, Allan distinguishes two different models of practical reasoning, the one about the end and the one about the norm, thereby paving the way for the separation of deliberation and practical syllogism. Wiggins views practical reasoning searching for the means to an end as "productive". By it, practical reason focuses on the means for achieving the end as an object or an outcome other than the deliberated means, as is the case with the arts and technical knowledge. The second model of practical reasoning can be defined as normative. Its conclusion is the choice of the norm suited to a particular instance. According to Allan, Aristotle distinguishes these two kinds of reasoning in *Eth. nic.* III

---

thing of the sort; so that in one sense we call those acts just that tend to produce and preserve happiness and its components for the political society"; *Polit.* 1333b26–30.

64 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1105a34; 1135b3–8; 1144a13–14; 1167a14–15.

65 D. Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason", in A. Rorty Oksenberg (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1980, 221–240.

and VI–VII respectively. Wiggins praises Allan for brushing aside the traditional simplistic view that deliberation cannot be about the end but only about the means. Yet he disputes Allan's idea that Aristotle's notion of end evolved into that of norm, as if practical reasoning based on the rule-case relationship were axiologically superior to reasoning based on the means-end relationship. This would mislead us into thinking that Aristotle, moving on from *Eth. nic.* III to VI–VII, turned his interest from practical knowledge based on utility and desire to the formulation of a theory of duty. Wiggins' correction to Allan's view can be summed up as follows. Aristotle's formula τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος is to be regarded as including not only the means, but also the basic components of the end. If we set aside the case of arts and technical activities, which Aristotle cites by way of example, and consider the search for the good and happiness, then deliberation turns out to be not just a stochastic<sup>66</sup> search for conditions which are useful to the end yet alien to it, but a process of analysis and specification of the end:

In the nontechnical case I shall characteristically have an extremely vague description of something I want—a good life, a satisfying profession, an interesting holiday, an amusing evening—and the problem is not to see what will be causally efficacious in bringing this about but to see what really *qualifies* as an adequate and practically realizable specification of what would satisfy this want. Deliberation is still *zetēsis*, a search, but it is not primarily a search for means. It is a search for the *best specification*. Till the specification is available there is no room for means. When this specification is reached, means-end deliberation can start, but difficulties that turn up in this means-end deliberation may send me back a finite number of times to the problem of a better or more practicable specification of the end. And the whole interest and difficulty of the matter is in the search for adequate specifications, not in the technical means-end sequel or sequels.<sup>67</sup>

These remarks are relevant to our present inquiry. First, a more unitary reading of books III and VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* enables us to understand, in Wig-

66 The adjective *στοχαστικός* is sometimes used by Aristotle to indicate the capacity of achieving the mean between excess and defect, rather than the means to an end, cf. *Eth. nic.* 1106b15–16; b28; 1109a22; a30. Indeed, it seems that moral virtue itself is in a sense stochastic. On the other hand, Aristotle also employs the verb *στοχάζομαι* in relation to pleasure, cf. *Eth. nic.* 1126b29–30; 1127a7–8; 1129b15.

67 *Art. cit.*, 228.

gins' view, that deliberation is an intellectual process whereby we reflect on or examine the quality of the end and characterize the desired object ever more precisely. The instrumental search for the means starts only when this characterization or specification has been completed. Wiggins in a way seems to me to split deliberative reasoning into two distinct and non-concomitant intellectual processes. The deliberating subject at first increasingly specifies, through a process of analysis, the notion of the end, then searches for the best conditions to achieve it. The description of deliberation as a sort of analysis is actually borne out by some Aristotelian passages.<sup>68</sup> Yet in my view, the two aspects of deliberative reflection that Wiggins describes as distinct—specification of the end and search for the means to it—, can be traced back to a single intellectual procedure, i.e. problematic analysis. I shall deal with this later on.<sup>69</sup>

Second, Wiggins' interpretation is based, albeit implicitly, on the distinction between action and production, which is discussed by other scholars as well. The distinction between technical and non-technical deliberation corresponds to that between deliberation in the domain of arts and productive sciences and deliberation searching for a correct praxis. Finally, the assumption that deliberation has to characterize the end highlights the importance of the situation or circumstance. For deliberation is, among other things, an inquiry into the desirability and worth of an end under different circumstances, and into the comparative desirability of the conditions that have to be met in order to achieve it. This reduces the importance of the model of practical reasoning based on the rule-case relationship, and downplays the role of the norm, or rule, whose generality and uniformity can conflict with a particular and contingent case.<sup>70</sup>

J. Ackrill too relies on the difference between production and praxis to define the object of deliberation.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, he evokes the distinction between an object desirable in itself and an object desirable because of something else, and emphasizes the role played by the assessment of circumstances. An important consequence of Ackrill's analysis is the following. When the end for the sake of which we deliberate and choose a productive action coincides with the implementation of a norm (whether moral or legal), then the end is not a "product", i.e. the outcome of an action from which it is distinct, but the value we ascribe

68 See Aristotle's use of ἀνάλυσις in *Eth. nic.* 112b23, to describe deliberation; and *Metaph.* 1032b5.

69 See pp. 84–88.

70 *Art. cit.*, 229–231, 234.

71 J. Ackrill, "Aristotle on Action", in A. Rorty Oksenberg (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., 93–101.

to the productive action. Ackrill's example is that of someone mending his or her neighbour's fence, i.e. performing a "productive" act in Aristotle's sense, in order to return a favour. The productive act, i.e. the mending of the fence, is a mere instrument for fulfilling a moral obligation, i.e. return a favour. When the fence is mended, the end has been achieved, though only because it had been agreed that the mending of the fence would be an acceptable compensation. Ackrill makes two further points. First, as his example makes clear, in the process of deliberation knowledge of the circumstances plays a key role (the mending of the fence has no moral significance in itself, but acquires it under particular circumstances, i.e. when it aims at returning a favour). Second, deliberation comprises a complex description of the kinds of action that are both worth performing in themselves and useful for other ends:

When [Aristotle] does speak of what we may want to *do* he is naturally often concerned with cases in which deliberation is involved, where one thing is done as a means to another or where the pros and cons of a course of action have to be weighed up. So an immediate distinction presents itself between what one primarily wants to do and what one wants to do derivatively, insofar as one thinks it necessary to achieve one's real aim. Should we then say that what we *really* want to do, or want to do without qualification, is only what we want nonderivatively to do? Aristotle come close to do this in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.9.1 ... This suggests a series or hierarchy of descriptions of what a man does because he desires to, each successive description coming nearer to revealing what he aims at.<sup>72</sup>

Akrill's thesis closely resembles that of Wiggins and of those scholars who maintain that the object of deliberation is the nature and the basic components of the notion of the end. Yet in Ackrill's opinion Aristotle seems committed as well to a general view of practical reason as normative reason prescribing the goods that are desirable for the sake of something else (e.g. the mending of the fence) as well as the goods that are desirable for the sake of something else and for their own sake at the same time. In addition, he claims that for Aristotle happiness is the state that includes and comprises as many goods as possible and all particular virtues.<sup>73</sup> Happiness is the ultimate end of all actions leading directly to it as well as of those leading to particular goods. These particular goods may

---

<sup>72</sup> "Aristotle on Action", cit., 99f.

<sup>73</sup> J.L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudamonia*", in A. Rorty Oksenberg (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., 15–33.

themselves be ends and therefore they may be pursued for themselves.<sup>74</sup> For example: health may be desired for itself, not just in order to do what we can do only if we are healthy; justice is worth practising for itself, i.e. regardless of whether it is concomitant with other virtuous habits. Moral virtues are worth choosing both for themselves and as “means” for achieving *eudaimonia*.

Two further significant discussions of these issues are offered by J. McDowell and M. Nussbaum. McDowell conducts an analysis of the meanings of *eudaimonia* in Aristotle.<sup>75</sup> He argues that Aristotle has a twofold view of the motives for action: they can be moral and aimed at realizing a standard of excellence, i.e. moral virtue; or they can be prudential and linked to the desire for a certain end. If happiness is viewed as the fulfilment of desire, then prudential reason prevails and a “decisional procedure” occurs, which has as its condition a common concept of what is supremely desirable for human beings. On the other hand, if happiness coincides with the realization of moral virtue, then fulfilment of desire is not the end of action.<sup>76</sup> McDowell’s distinction between moral and prudential reason corresponds to that between norm and end. Moreover, it implicitly presupposes the idea that conformity to a norm is axiologically superior to prudential reason. McDowell attaches great significance to the distinction between praxis and production: only the latter has to do with a decisional procedure, since such a procedure aims to achieve an objective which is external to action and distinct from it. Therefore, a decisional procedure, i.e. deliberative reasoning, only takes place according to the prudential perspective, i.e. only when a desire arises. This seems to mean that we deliberate only to fulfil a desire. By contrast, when we implement a norm dictated by moral reason, we do not deliberate, for in this case we do not have to decide what to do by referring to a standard of effectiveness; rather, we have to understand the moral quality of what we have to do, even when our desires are frustrated. McDowell’s reading of Aristotle is characterized by a tension between the norm and the end, as well as by hints at an idea that other modern scholars subscribe to: in Aristotle’s practical philosophy there is a sense of normative reason which triggers action *in place of* desire, thereby prescribing us what to do in a different

74 “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*”, cit., 29 f.: “... when Aristotle says that *A* is for the sake of *B*, he need not mean that *A* is a means to subsequent *B* but may mean that *A* contributes as a constituent to *B* ... this is what he does mean when he says that good actions are for the sake of *eudaimonia*”.

75 J. McDowell, “The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*”, in A. Oksenberg Rorty, op. cit., 359–376. A recent commentary of McDowell’s interpretation of this issue is by A. Price, “Aristotle on the Ends of Deliberation”, in M. Pakaluk-G. Pearson (eds.), *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle*, OUP, Oxford 2011, 135–158.

76 Cf. *art. cit.*, 368–370.



way from how desire indicates the end. What interests us in McDowell's interpretation is that it does not entirely coincide with the view that deliberation is also about the nature of the end. Rather, it seems to hint that there exists a kind of practical reason (i.e. a reason concerning human action) which has a *dialectical* rather than a deliberative character, and can give us norms and rules of conduct.

M. Nussbaum openly subscribes to the idea that deliberation is about the components of the notion of the end, not just the extrinsic means to it. Hence, she regards the notion of rule as having a somewhat "instrumental" value. Yet a rule does not coincide entirely with the general norm of which the deliberated action is an instance. A rule sometimes corresponds to an action we choose and perform with a view to a certain end, and whose performing reflects a habit of our character, i.e. a moral virtue:

We may choose one action over another because it counts as an instance of courage and is thus a component of the good life for us.<sup>77</sup>

The word "component" suggests that a courageous action is a means to an end, yet only because it reflects a moral habit. We act in accord with certain practical rules only if we possess a moral habit, i.e. only if our courageous or just act is a deeply-rooted and habitual attitude. Nussbaum then seems to share Wiggins's idea that deliberation within the moral domain is a kind of reasoning about the essence of the end, whereas in the field of technique and productive activity it is the search for instruments that are alien to the end. However, I think it is wrong to contrast an ethical or, more generally, a practical deliberation with a productive deliberation. The idea that deliberation can play a prescriptive role and lead to the implementation of a rule (i.e. of a suitable praxis for achieving an end), becomes clearer if we consider the case of the arts: to produce something like an artefact or a particular state, e.g. recovery from a disease, we have to perform certain operations, that is, we have to implement the rules of some art. I would suggest that acting in a courageous or a just way with a view to happiness is for Aristotle something like implementing a treatment with a view to recovery.

Generally speaking, modern scholars have often described Aristotle as holding a generic view of normativity. It is not always easy, however, to find a sys-

---

<sup>77</sup> Aristotle. *De motu animalium*, cit., 198. An analogous perspective can be found in H. Segvic, "Deliberation and Choice in Aristotle", in M. Pakaluk-G. Pearson (eds.), *Moral Psychology*, cit., 159–184.

tematic and detailed view of normativity in his texts.<sup>78</sup> He certainly employs a variety of normative concepts, yet it is impossible to clearly identify a set of technical terms about *norms* or the idea that norms, as a guide for conduct, are morally superior to ends and desires. We have to admit that Aristotle has a precise notion of law, *nomos*, which sometimes refers to more than just political law. Moreover, he systematically refers to two concepts that play a prominent role in his practical philosophy, i.e. end, τέλος, which characterizes *practical* reason, and function, ἔργον. The latter sometimes indicates, in the ethical and political domain, the “task” corresponding to the nature of an agent, thus taking on an interesting prescriptive meaning. The expression ὀρθὸς λόγος has a clear normative sense too, yet Aristotle himself points out its purely formal and universal meaning and lack of prescriptive content. The notion of ὀρθὸς λόγος is closely linked with that of ὄρος, i.e. the criterion enabling us to identify, in the different domains of action, the “mean”, i.e. the limit beyond which there lies an excess or a defect. Finally, the formula τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος can also be regarded as indicating a norm, yet a more particular and detailed one, which we might identify with the *rule*. If practical reasoning starts from a certain end, and if the agent has some experience of the ways for achieving that end, then the “means” turn out to be practical rules to be implemented and prescribed every time it is necessary to do so. We have to assume that Aristotle has a concept of norm and a concept of rule. These notions play two different roles within deliberative reasoning, for they have different origins. A norm is quite similar to an end. A rule can sometimes have an instrumental sense. A prescription is an expression of a rule.

#### 4 Circumstances. The Particularistic Interpretation

Up to now, we have examined the logical structure of the so-called practical syllogism and of deliberative reasoning. We have also briefly discussed norms and their difference from rules construed as useful actions for implementing a more general norm or achieving an end. Both these topics are related to

<sup>78</sup> See M. Vegetti, “Normal, naturel, normatif dans l’éthique d’Aristote”, in G. Romeyer Dherbey-G. Aubry (eds.), *L’excellence de la vie. Sur “l’Éthique à Nicomaque” et “l’Éthique à Eudème” d’Aristote*, Vrin, Paris 2002, 63–67. R. Kraut, “Doing without Morality: Reflections on the Meaning of ‘dein’ in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 30 (2006), 159–200, correctly observes that in Aristotle, if not ancient ethics, there is no room for a systematic concept of normativity construed in the light of an imperative. The verb *dein* in Aristotle’s ethical treatises should not be interpreted as a ‘dutifulness’ but rather in the light of the notion of *telos*.

another much-debated issue about prescription, i.e. circumstances and their role in deliberation. The examination of the particular situation or contingent case, i.e. of the context in which an agent acts and implements general norms, plays a significant part in the discussion of deliberation, not just out of respect for common sense, but for formal reasons, i.e. because of the logical structure of practical reasoning. Both deliberation and practical syllogism have as one of their constitutive elements, albeit in distinct ways, perception or representation of an actual situation. Even when deliberation ends not with a practical choice by the deliberating person, but with a rule of conduct, i.e. a prescription, in this case too the consideration of the variety of circumstances in which people adopting the rule will come to be is very important. The effectiveness of a deliberative reasoning also depends on the ability to contextualise the practical rules. Aristotle describes the deliberating procedure as an inquiry moving “backwards”, i.e. starting from the desired end and going back, so to speak, identifying all the preliminary conditions for achieving the end, until it comes to the first action within the deliberating subject’s reach. In the course of this inquiry, we may come across a number of different ways for achieving the end. Which one of them we choose depends mostly, though not exclusively, on the specific circumstances in which we are deliberating. Circumstances are implicitly referred to in the formulation of practical syllogism, more precisely in the minor premise. Generally speaking, Aristotle emphasizes that practical wisdom is knowledge of particular things.<sup>79</sup> By this, he means that knowledge of extremely general norms about action has no prescriptive effectiveness and cannot be a guide for conduct.

The domain where Aristotle views circumstances as playing a particularly prominent role is that of voluntary act and the so-called mixed action, i.e. an action which is voluntary as it is the outcome of a choice—though the choice is determined not by normative principles that the agent adopts, but by circumstances:

With regard to the things that are done from fear of greater evils or for some noble object (e.g. if a tyrant were to order one to do something base, having one’s parents and children in his power, and if one did the action they were to be saved, but otherwise would be put to death), it may be debated whether such actions are involuntary or voluntary. Something of the sort happens also with regard to the throwing of goods overboard in a storm; for in the abstract (ἀπλῶς) no one throws goods away voluntar-

---

79 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1141b15–16; 1142a14–15; 1143a32–33.

ily, but on condition of its securing the safety of himself and his crew any sensible man does so. Such actions, then, are mixed, but are more like voluntary actions; for they are worthy of choice at the time when they are done, and the end of an action is relative to the occasion (αίρεται γάρ εἰσι τότε ὅτε πράττονται, τὸ δὲ τέλος τῆς πράξεως κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν ἐστίν).<sup>80</sup>

It seems that Aristotle here is proposing a twofold assessment of action: either ἀπλῶς, i.e. regardless of the actual circumstances in which it took place, or with respect to a specific context or even an emergency, such as the threat represented by a tyrant or a sea storm. A more careful look will reveal that the “mixed” action, i.e. one which is chosen because of a specific danger, is deliberated with a view to an end just like any other action. What distinguishes it from the usual conduct is that the end is closely linked to the circumstances. This is why circumstances have such a great significance for prescription; this issue is perhaps even more complicated than seems to be the case at first glance. For it is quite clear that anyone deliberating with a view to an end, either individual or collective, has to consider the feasibility of his or her purpose and choose the most suitable actions for achieving the end according to the circumstances in which he or she happens to be. These circumstances will be the object of perception, imagination and practical intellect. It is not equally clear, however, how circumstances are to be evaluated in the formulation of a prescription, if prescription is a regulation of other people's conduct. At any rate, Aristotle appears to think that prescriptive activity is strongly influenced by circumstances, since he criticizes the generality and fixedness of the written *nomos*. The idea that “the end of an action is relative to the occasion (κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν)” does not only mean that our purposes change according to the circumstances. It means also that what has to change are the so-called intermediate objectives, i.e., the actions which enable us to realize the preliminary conditions of the ultimate end, and which can depend on the circumstances as well.

Some scholars have argued in different ways that in Aristotle's practical philosophy perception of particular cases is much more significant than norms, and that Aristotle proposes no norms or rules, but rather a “situational sensitivity”. Some have come close to describing him as the champion of particularistic ethics. This is the case with J. McDowell:<sup>81</sup> he counts Aristotle among the philosophers that claim it is impossible to “codify” action and formulate a

80 *Eth. nic.* 110a4–13.

81 J. McDowell, “Virtue and Reason”, *The Monist*, Vol. 62, No. 3: *The Concept of a Person in Ethical Theory* (July, 1979), 331–350; see esp. 331–332.

stable and permanent system of norms and rules of conduct. The notion of sensitivity plays a key role here. By *sensitivity*, McDowell means a perceptive and intelligent ability to grasp particulars and interpret them in accord with the system of ends and desires of the deliberating individual. Within the context of Aristotle's theory of practical syllogism, this amounts to the ability of formulating the minor premise. From such a perspective, however, it is difficult to account both for the formulation of the major premise, which should play the role of a fairly general norm, and for the usefulness of practical syllogism construed as the explanation for a certain action:

If we ... respect Aristotle's belief that a view of how one should live is not codifiable, what happens to our explanations of a virtuous person's reliably right judgments as to what he should do on particular occasions? Aristotle's notion of the practical syllogism is obviously meant to apply here.<sup>82</sup>

The concept of sensitivity has exerted considerable influence. It has been taken up by a number of scholars who, given Aristotle's frequent definition of practical wisdom as knowledge of particulars, describe him as holding a particularistic view and a theory of virtue as ability to adjust to specific circumstances.<sup>83</sup> The notion of sensitivity remains nonetheless quite controversial and scholars disagree about whether it can really be found in Aristotle's practical philosophy. Yet there is no denying that Aristotle does sometimes seem to be hinting at it. Sensitivity bears a clear resemblance to what he calls practical *nous*,<sup>84</sup> whose task it is to grasp the conditions for implementing a general norm, i.e. to formulate the minor premise of practical syllogisms. D.T. Devereux<sup>85</sup> makes two interesting points. He begins by distinguishing different senses of knowledge of particulars, i.e. knowledge of individual and contingent cases and knowledge of specific types of practical situations. He then goes on to emphasize—quite

82 *Art. cit.*, 342.

83 Among recent contributions, see R.B. Louden, "Aristotle's Practical Particularism", *Ancient Philosophy*, 6 (1986), 123–138; N. White, "Ethical Particularism in Aristotle", in W. Hogrebe (ed.), *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2004, 54–61; A.W. Price, "Was Aristotle a Particularist?", in J.J. Cleary-G.M. Gurtler (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 21, Brill, Leiden 2006, 191–212 and B. Clarke, "Commentary on Price", *ibidem*, 213–231; M. Zingano, "Moral Particularism and Aristotelian Ethics", in G. Rossi (ed.), *Nature and the Best Life. Exploring the Natural Bases of Practical Normativity in Ancient Philosophy*, Olms, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York 2013, 95–125.

84 Cf. *De an.* 433a13–14, a16.

85 D.T. Devereux, "Particular and Universal in Aristotle's Conception of Practical Knowledge", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 39 (1986), 483–504.

appropriately in my view—that, in addition to the pair universal-particular, there is knowledge of the regularity of situations and of the effectiveness of the practical measures we adopt on the basis of our knowledge of both universals and particulars. An example for this is a doctor's practical knowledge. Devereux also thinks that Aristotle's view about this issue changed under the influence of Plato's *Statesman*.<sup>86</sup> After writing the treatises that form books IV–VI of the *Eudemian Ethics* and discussing monarchy in the III book of the *Politics*, Aristotle subscribed to Plato's criticism of written law. Later on, he applied that criticism of political law to universal norms, and finally came to define his own notion of wisdom as practical knowledge of particulars:

Aristotle first accepted the Platonic point about the complexity and variability of human actions, and followed Plato's lead in seeing the significance of this observation *only* in connection with law. Later on he apparently came to see the broader implications of the observation: to the extent that ethics and politics in general are concerned with human actions, there will be a similar deficiency in their universal statements and principles. Ethics and politics will inevitably lack the precision characteristic of the more exact theoretical sciences.

p. 502

Devereux's historiographical remarks seem to me to be reflected in some recent works about the development of Aristotle's practical thinking. As I will show, however, the view that we can most plausibly regard Aristotle as holding is that practical wisdom requires both knowledge of particulars and, most importantly, the identification of a comparative regularity of the situations in which an agent happens to be. The varied circumstances of life have somehow to be placed within a framework of similar and, within certain limits, predictable situations. It is only the predictability of circumstances that enables us to prescribe rules.

M. Burnyeat offers a different treatment of circumstances and of their significance, particularly for education.<sup>87</sup> He takes as his starting point Aristotle's remark in *Eth. nic.* 1095b2–13 that moral education has first of all to teach the *that*, τὸ ὅτι, i.e. the notions of beauty, justice, and the political good. This can be followed by learning *because*, διότι. In Burnyeat's opinion, knowledge of *because* is possessed by someone who is

86 Cf. 500–502.

87 M.F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good", in A. Rorty Oksenberg (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., 69–92.

equipped with the understanding to work out for himself what to do in the varied circumstances of life, while the one who takes to heart sound advice learns “the *that*” and becomes the sort of person who can profit from Aristotle’s lectures.<sup>88</sup>

The difference between this perspective and the strictly particularistic one is fairly clear. People possessing the knowledge of *δίότι* can act correctly under changing circumstances not in virtue of their situational sensitivity, or not just in virtue of it, but also because of their understanding of the causes. In addition, Burnyeat elaborates on the well-known remark in *Eth. nic.* 1094b13–16, where Aristotle argues that we cannot conduct all inquiries with the same degree of accuracy, because the objects of political science are varied and ever-changing. He also refers to some passages where Aristotle emphasizes the difficulty of implementing a constant practical rule (see e.g. *Eth. nic.* 1109b22–24 and 1126b2–4) and rather relies on “perception of particulars (*αἴσθησις καὶ ἔκαστα*)”. Traditional rules and precepts are not sufficient to acquire the general notions of the “noble” or the “beautiful”: a perception of things is needed. Burnyeat concludes that Aristotle regards moral education as the transmission to the young of a general evaluative and critical attitude that enables them to identify the good in the course of their experience and amid ever-changing circumstances. This attitude does not stem from fixed rules, but from knowledge and habit, which shape the character.

If we are to understand why and within what limits the topic of circumstances is significant for our present inquiry, we first have to look more closely at certain strains within the general particularistic exegesis of Aristotelian ethics. To start with, let us deal with the interpretation that reduces particularism to the conceptual perspective, according to which beings are either necessary and eternal, or neither necessary nor eternal. The latter can be divided into beings that exist “most of the time” and beings that do not even exist “most of the time”. Some scholars trace Aristotle’s alleged ethical particularism back to this distinction, and thereby provide it with an ontological foundation. In the domain of human action, where necessity and eternity have no place, beings and events exist either “most of the time” or not even “most of the time”; human actions can be performed on the basis of this distinction drawn by empirical knowledge. Aristotle’s ethical particularism, therefore, is limited and, so to speak, regulated by the comparative constancy and repetitiveness of things (i.e. their occurring “most of the time”) and by our experience of this state of

---

88 *Art. cit.*, 71.

affairs. (For example, if we know that antipyretics do not work when the moon is new,<sup>89</sup> we are aware of a fact that, though representing an exception to the effectiveness of antipyretics, has its own regularity, even if we are unaware of its scientific cause.)

In addition to this interpretation, founded on the concept of “most of the time” and applicable to both natural and practical events, there is a slightly different one, which I view as more faithful to Aristotle’s thinking. According to it, the proof of Aristotle’s particularistic stance can be seen in his emphasizing not that particular cases and situations are inevitably ever-changing, but that *we have to alter* our attitude and adjust it to the circumstances, when they require us to achieve different practical, moral and political ends. In other words, Aristotle is well aware that practical reality lacks necessity and stability, and that a rule, whatever its degree of generality, cannot perfectly correspond to a contingent case or a particular situation. Yet he is equally aware that indeterminacy in the practical domain is the condition that enables us to both deliberate and make choices. Consequently, indeterminacy in the practical domain enables us to assess moral character as well—which would be impossible within a system of necessary and wholly uniform acts. Second, Aristotle suggests that the difference in our deliberated choices, i.e. our acts, depends on the changeability of both circumstances and our ends. For example, two people that perform different acts under different circumstances may be motivated by the same end. Yet for Aristotle it is equally or even more important to point out that within a cohesive social structure where many people act, there is a *single* order of multiple ends, each of which requires a different course of deliberated actions.

## 5 The Shaping of Habit

One of the goals of prescription is to help shape character, or moral habit. By character or habit (ἥθος) Aristotle means the attitude that the desiring soul adopts in accord with the dictates of prescriptive reason (κατὰ ἐπιτακτικὸν λόγον).<sup>90</sup> Moral character is the tendency of a particular kind of desire, i.e. volition (βούλησις), to turn towards the objects that practical reason judges as worthy, and to pursue them according to the standard of the mean.<sup>91</sup> According to Aristotle, character can be good or wicked because it pursues or avoids

89 Cf. *Metaph.* 1027a24–25.

90 *Eth. eud.* 1220a38–b6.

91 *Eth. eud.* 1233b16–18.



certain pleasures and pains,<sup>92</sup> and moral quality is revealed by the ends people choose, since it is ethical virtue, not just practical reasoning, that makes the end good.<sup>93</sup> So, it seems that prescription must counter perversion of desire and induce the soul to desire good ends, urging us to repeat the acts whose goodness is evident.

However, the relationship between prescriptive reason and ἡθός, established at *Eth. eud.* 1220b5, raises some questions. First of all, prescriptive reason seems to be very similar to deliberative and calculating (βουλευτική, λογιστική) reason, i.e. a faculty that indicates the *means* to an end. Prescription, then, even when aimed at shaping someone else's moral character, should indicate certain specific actions or rules of conduct as the most appropriate means to get a moral end and objects of choice, rather than delineate the moral end as object of volition. Second: if the prescription aimed at character formation is the same as any prescribing act, it is not easy to understand how it will bring about the prescribed person's moral progress. The prescribed action derives from a deliberative reasoning carried out by the prescriber, not by those who are supposed to act according to the prescription. When deliberation leads to a prescription, instead of a personal choice, the moral quality revealed by the prescribed action, once performed, reflects the goodness of the end for the sake of which it is prescribed. In other words, when someone acts in conformity to an order, a precept, or even following a rule of conduct that someone else has established, the goodness of the end for the sake of which the action is performed seems to concern the deliberating subject rather than the agent.

Scholars have faced these issues in various ways. For instance, those holding that for Aristotle deliberation is also about the end—since it helps to specify its quality—tend to view deliberative reasoning as playing a crucial role in turning desire towards certain ends.<sup>94</sup> So, it might seem that prescription

92 *Eth. eud.* 1221b30–32; 1222a7–22; and above all 1227b5–11: “It follows then, since moral excellence is itself a mean and wholly concerned with pleasures and pains, and badness lies in excess or defect and is concerned with the same matters as excellence, that moral excellence is a habit tending to choose the mean in relation to us in things pleasant and painful, in regard to which, according as one is pleased or pained, men are said to have a definite sort of character; for one is not said to have a special sort of character merely for liking what is sweet or what is bitter”. Cf. also *Eth. nic.* 1111b5–6; 1127a15–17.

93 On this issue, cf. U. Coope, “Why does Aristotle Think that Ethical Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?”, *Phronesis*, 57 (2012) 142–163.

94 Cf. D. Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason” cit.; H. Lorenz, “Virtue of Character in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 37 (2009), 177–212; see also H. Curzer, “How Good People do Bad Things. Aristotle on the Misdeeds of the Virtuous”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 28 (2005), 233–256, who attributes to Aristotle a realistic, rather than idealized, perspective about the virtuous character; Id., *Aristotle on*

too, as resulting from a deliberative reasoning, can illuminate the goodness and the desirability of the moral end, while prescribing the appropriate actions and practical rules to get it. Others have considered the relation of prescription to moral character formation in the light of both the acquisition of right opinions about the end and the repetitiveness of the prescribed actions.<sup>95</sup> The prescribed actions become customary, which makes them into traits of the individual character. Indeed, in many cases the means for achieving the end require some kind of repetition. Repetition of an act may be required by the very nature of the end: this is the case when a repeated action, not a single act, represents the necessary condition for achieving the desired end (e.g. a good musical performance). Consequently, our character acquires a quality that the mere act of volition would not be sufficient to produce.

However plausible these views may appear, it seems to me that prescription of actions as means to an end is totally different from the identification of the moral end. Delineating (and teaching) the moral end is the task of reason, but not of deliberative and prescriptive *logos*. Defining certain objects as good, worth pursuing, and, more generally, as ends, is not the operation of deliberative, calculative reason, but, in a certain sense, of theoretical reason, although the objects of inquiry are not eternal, nor necessary. Reason, at least from the point of view of procedure and intellectual functioning, defines practical objects just as it defines other objects, i.e. by searching for their definitions. In such cases it seems that reason, strictly speaking, cannot be called “practical”, if by this term we mean deliberative or calculative: even if it thinks about objects pertaining to human action, it relies at first on dialectical procedures. This kind of reasoning enables one to start with reputed opinions, plausible beliefs, and, then, make assertions (i.e. statements that are either true or false) based on the analysis of the essence of a certain practical good (if, for instance, one wants to define the essence, the *τί ἐστίν*, of courage or justice). In addition to having the form of assertions, these statements have a normative predicate, i.e. a predicate stating that something is worth pursuing as an end. Therefore, these statements propose the ends, the objects of desire for the sake of which

---

*Virtues*, OUP, Oxford 2012, 323–336. For an overall examination, see K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*, Routledge, London 2015. For a new, somehow conciliatory view, see J.P. Belmúdez, “Practical Reason, Habit, and Care in Aristotle”, *Praxis Filosófica*, 43, 2016, 77–102.

95 P. Gottlieb, *The Virtue of Aristotle's Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2009, 134, 147–150; P.L. Donini, *Abitudine e saggezza. Aristotele dall'Etica Eudemia all'Etica Nicomachea*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2014, 107–120, holds that for Aristotle the end is determined by a number of concomitant factors: virtue, opinion and desire all compete in positing the end and, indirectly, in shaping character.

practical reason proper, i.e. deliberative reason, will show and prescribe the suitable means. There is, then, a considerable difference between prescribing an act with a view to the end and the normative character of the statement that something is good.

When aimed at shaping the character of someone, prescription is of actions which should be object of choice, *προαίρεσις*, by the person who receives a prescription. The relevance that this kind of prescription reveals in forming the character and orienting desires depends on two factors. First, the person wishing to shape someone's character prescribes particular actions, or types of actions, not only in order to transmit mostly executive commands (*do this, not that*), but also to promote a critical and evaluative ability. For instance, the act of prescribing some gymnastic exercises or musical practices can have different purposes. It can be imparted in order to let students get a good physical condition or good musical ability. But actually teachers' prescriptions have as their main goal the transmission of a custom, a habit that allows students to carry out exercises and practices by themselves, making them objects of choice as means to a good end. While the notion of end is provided by theoretical and dialectical reason, the path to goodness is indicated by *logos epitaktikos*. Aristotle's point is that habit is the outcome of our conscientious and conscious observance of the rules we are given. More precisely, moral habit is the state of a desire that no longer needs the prescription that gives rise to habit. In the shaping of habit, therefore, prescription of certain actions is more effective than formulation of normative opinions, since normative opinions, albeit persuasive, give rise to no practical custom. In a *Rhetoric* passage, Aristotle argues that, of the actions we are responsible for, some are dictated by custom (*ἔθος*), others by rational desire, i.e. volition, others by irrational drives such as anger and appetite.<sup>96</sup> Although custom and volition are distinct and sometimes independent factors of action, it is clear that, unlike opinion, they are both practical motives.

The second factor making prescription greatly relevant in moral education and character formation is the ability to deal with particular cases and the assessment of circumstances. This might appear inconsistent with the very idea

---

96 Cf. *Rhet.* 1369a1–4: "All actions that are due to a man himself and cause by himself are due either to habit or to desire; and of the latter, some are due to rational desire, the other to irrational. Rational desire is volition, and volition is a desire for good—nobody wishes for anything unless he thinks it good". On this passage and about the characterization of volition as peculiarly human desire, or motivation, see J. Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good. Perception, Phantasia, Thought, and Desire*, OUP, Oxford, 2012, 138.

of *habit*: habit should be a constant and stable disposition,<sup>97</sup> whereas the ability to adapt choices according to the situations seems to make human behaviour variable. It may be complicated to reconcile the shaping of a good habit, which has to be based on uniform behaviour, with the need to develop at the same time the ability to assess the disparate and ever-changing circumstances of life. A possible solution to this puzzle, i.e. one we can plausibly regard Aristotle as subscribing to, is the theory of the hierarchical order of ends. The position we occupy within the social and political body, or any other organization, varies according to the degree of generality of the end with a view to which we act. In the same way, the habit acquired by those who either act themselves or carry out someone else's orders varies according to the degree of generality of the object towards which they develop a constant and stable propensity. The higher the degree of generality of the object, the greater will presumably be the ability to assess the different circumstances—or, to put it differently, the ability to call in deliberative reason in order to achieve an end. The following example, inspired by those familiar to Aristotle, will help clarify my point. A group of good craftsmen have acquired, thanks to a long apprenticeship, a “technical habit”, i.e. mastery of their art and its practical rules. Their mastery enables them to act even in the absence of (renewed) instructions. It is unnecessary to prescribe for them on every occasion what they should do and how: flute-makers can make flutes; blacksmiths can forge iron. Good household managers, good officials, good magistrates, since they have higher ends than those of technical and purely productive activities, develop a higher and, so to speak, a more regulative habit. In virtue of such a regulative habit, good household managers know how much food is necessary according to the number of the components of the household; good officials and magistrates know when the good of a community requires manual craftsmen, trained troops, or other kinds of productive performances. The higher the goal pursued, the greater the number of people on whom authority is exercised, the more stable and uniform will be the capacity to give directives.

## 6 Concluding Remarks on the Debate about Practical Reasoning

The various questions related to Aristotle's theory of practical reasoning and the vast debate they have aroused allow us to make the following points. First, quite a few scholars apparently regard Aristotle's notion of practical reason-

---

97 See, for instance, *Eth. eud.* 1239b12–13.

ing as indicating both the kind of reasoning we rely on when are searching for the right way to achieve an objective or carry out a task, and the analysis we perform to understand the motives for a certain conduct or, more generally, human behaviour. Of course, this does not depend on their failure fully to grasp the difference between the perspective of the deliberating subject, i.e. of someone thinking about what they have to do, and the perspective of those who inquire into the motives of someone else's actions. Rather, it depends on the view that the latter analysis, aimed at clarifying the reasons and motives for a certain conduct, has somehow to go through the stages of deliberation; and, more importantly, on the idea that *practical* reasoning is about actions expressed as propositions.

This assumption underlies both the interpretations that tend to identify deliberation and practical syllogism and, to some extent, those tending to differentiate them. As we have seen, some scholars argue that practical syllogism is the deduction of a particular and immediate action from a general norm. Others regard practical syllogism as the *ex post* explanation of an action, i.e. as an argument revealing its cause; both tend to construe the two kinds of reasoning, deliberation and practical syllogism, as similar instances of practical reasoning. This view is questionable. Aristotle holds that thinking is *practical* when it is aimed at an end and the possibility of achieving it, i.e. at action. By contrast, theoretical thinking aims to discover truth and searches for the causes and definitions of things.<sup>98</sup> Consequently, if the model of syllogism by which Aristotle accounts for human movement (in *De motu animalium*) or the actions of the incontinent (in *Eth. nic.* VII) reveals the cause of human movement or incontinent actions, then, strictly speaking, it should be regarded not as practical reasoning, but as an inquiry aimed at discovering a cause, i.e. as a scientific inquiry aimed at an explanation. If this is so, practical reasoning proper turns out to be just the deliberative kind. Arguably, anyone wishing to find out the cause of a certain action must try to identify the deliberative process that led to that action and reconstruct it *ex post*. Nonetheless, the conclusion of the *ex post* reconstruction of a conduct is the discovery of the end, which is initially ignored by those performing the inquiry. By contrast, deliberative reasoning takes as its starting point the end, which is already known. The syllogism would then demonstrate that a certain action is the effect of a desire, i.e. the fact that the performed action belongs to a set of actions of which we predicate the desirability. Can we then define as *theoretical* the kind of reasoning that deduces an action from an end, and as *practical* proper only deliberative rea-

---

98 Cf. *De an.* 433a13–18.

soning? In principle, we can. It is clear, however, that the search for the cause of an action is not always and exclusively an *ex post* analysis of its motives; it may be a search for its plausibility and even preferability in comparison to another action, if one is to achieve a certain end. This is what Aristotle seems to me to be hinting at in the following passage:

The end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is action (for even if they consider how things are, practical men do not study what is eternal but what stands in some relation at some time). Now we do not know a truth without its cause; and a thing has a quality in a higher degree than other things if in virtue of it the similar quality belongs to the other things (e.g. fire is the hottest of things; for it is the cause of the heat of all other things); so that that which causes derivative truths to be true is most true.<sup>99</sup>

Aristotle is claiming that practical men (οἱ πρακτικοί) consider things in a theoretical way (θεωροῦσιν), for what they want to find out is not their eternal nature but their relationship with a certain state of affairs and certain circumstances. This allows us to argue that for Aristotle we can think theoretically even with a view to a practical end, for we have to know the world around us if we are to act and achieve certain objectives. In this case, θεωρεῖν is not the same as βουλεύεσθαι; it is a kind of theoretical reasoning, which will turn out to be useful for deliberating. The analysis of the notion of happiness and its components in order to understand what we must do to be happy, can serve as a good example of θεωρεῖν for deliberative purposes (it being understood that analysis of the notion of the end *is not* deliberation). What Aristotle says in the second part of the passage is even more interesting. Although performed with a view to action, theoretical knowledge has truth as its object, and we attain truth only when we get to know a cause: as a result, even within a deliberative inquiry we have to consider things theoretically in order to determine their truth by identifying their causes. But there is more to it. Aristotle argues that we know we are truthfully attaching a predicate to a subject when we can trace the predicate back to the cause in virtue of which it is predicated. In my view, Aristotle here is thinking of syllogism, and particularly of the role of the middle term. If this is so, we can legitimately describe him as holding that πρακτικοί too formulate true statements, albeit with regard to their proposed end, and prove the truth of their assertions in a deductive way, since they know their causes.

99 *Metaph.* 993b20–27.

Syllogism, then, turns out to play within the practical domain a more prominent part than the one it is thought to have when only *De motu* 7 and *Eth. nic.* VII are considered. What prevents us from thinking that in some cases, while reasoning, it is necessary or appropriate to alternate deliberative and deductive operations, so as to adduce the causes of what we are deliberating and thereby assess it? The syllogistic language of some *Ethics* passages, which I will discuss in some more detail in the next chapter, enables us to suggest the following hypothesis. Aristotle assumed that deliberative reasoning, or some part of it, can be converted, so to speak, into a syllogism showing that the conclusion of the deliberative process is, for one or more reasons, just as worth choosing. Thus, syllogism does not amount to deliberation, nor does it take its place, for it can only answer the *why* question, not the *how* or *in what way* question. Yet syllogism gives a key practical contribution in that it can confirm the truth of a normative proposition—whereas deliberation cannot. If this is sound, we are in the position to settle some of the issues raised by scholars. All the syllogisms Aristotle cites in psychological contexts and while discussing *akrasia*, inquire into the causes of action: they are instances of syllogisms about action. Yet these examples, which are *ex post* accounts of the end of an action, do not represent all possible kinds of syllogisms about action. A syllogism may reveal the cause of a certain action in a preliminary stage of assessment (i.e. while we are weighing an action that we might perform in the future). It may prove, in a deductive way, the efficacy of a particular action (walking) for the sake of a certain end (being healthy because of the good digestion favoured by walking). Syllogism, therefore, proves the appropriateness of an action and, then, turns out to have a function which is indirectly prescriptive, yet secondary to deliberation.

Moreover, on this hypothesis the conclusion of a practical syllogism is not *ipso facto* action. In this connection, John Cooper has made a pertinent remark:<sup>100</sup> deliberation ends with the identification not of a contingent action to be performed here and now, but of a *type* of actions. But this also holds for the kind of syllogism into which deliberative reasoning can be converted.<sup>101</sup> For syllogism too can deduce the truth of a normative proposition about a class or a type of actions. But if this is correct, this kind of syllogism, not ending with an action but a rule, contributes decisively to the prescriptive force of the rule itself. In fact, the rule is a proposition that *demonstrates* that a given action is worthy of choice because it is an application of a general norm suitable for a particular situation.

---

100 See *supra*, p. 66.

101 See *infra*, p. 142 ff.

A further critical point resides in the idea that a syllogism about action answers the *why* question apparently only if the latter is taken to mean: *what for, for what purpose?* The cause that a practical syllogism has to reconstruct seems to be only the final cause. Yet it need not be so, if my suggestion is sound, i.e. if deliberating subjects can rely on deductive reasoning while performing their deliberation, as well as when concluding it. The search for the final cause seems to make sense only *ex post*, i.e. when we are ignorant of the motive for an action and want to find it out. On the other hand, when we formulate a syllogism in order to prove the truth of a prescription, by referring to its cause, the cause cannot be the end, which is already known; it has to be an efficient or material principle. To use Aristotle's favourite example: while thinking about the best treatment for a patient, a doctor, in addition to performing a deliberative inquiry, arguably "syllogizes", i.e. he can prove the truth of his prescriptive statements by adducing their cause. This cause cannot be the end, for the end does not make *true* the deliberated statement about the means for achieving it; rather, it may be an efficient or a material cause. For instance, the deliberation to treat a patient with a certain drug is based on the drug containing an active principle that can cure the disease. These causes account for the specific statement reflecting either a certain stage in the deliberation or its conclusion. We have to emphasize, then, that the *why* question means *what for?* if it aims at finding out the motive for the action (*what is this person walking for?*). On the other hand, if it aims at finding out the reason for a *specific* choice, i.e. for an action performed instead of another which could achieve the same end, then the *why* question has a different meaning and calls for a different answer. When faced with some conduct and wishing to get an *ex post* account of it, we may ask *why?* even after we have got to know its end. If we know that someone walks in order to stay healthy, we may ask why he or she chose that action instead of another (e.g. having a swim or sunbathing, which are healthy practices too). The answer to such a *why* question (walking helps digestion) is actually intended to indicate an efficient cause. The cause by which we choose to perform a particular action, is itself an end (an "intermediate" end, as we might say)—yet only from the point of view of the praxis that comes after the choice (I walked in order to digest in order to be healthy), not from the point of view of deliberative reasoning that precedes the choice. For example, if someone wants to be healthy, he or she knows digestion must be good. Digestion is the objective with a view to which they go for a walk. But while deliberating and deciding what to do to be healthy, they will have to "explain to themselves" that digestion is the efficient cause of good health. If this is correct, we may convincingly argue that for Aristotle each stage of a deliberative process as well as the process in its entirety can be converted into a deduction in which the inter-



mediate objectives are efficient or material causes. Syllogism then becomes an argument that confirms deliberation.

The possibility of giving a causal explanation for each stage of deliberation is required by another essential character of deliberation, i.e. its dealing with multiple options. As we shall see in the next chapter, deliberation is both a problematic procedure moving “backwards” and a choice between at least two basic options: to perform a certain action or not to perform it. The “optative” nature of Aristotle’s deliberation has often been discussed. Aristotle refers to it in a number of passages, and speaks of deliberation even when an end can be achieved only in one way. This means two things: that way is not necessary (i.e. we may either act or refrain from acting); and, more importantly, it is deliberative reasoning, with the help of syllogism, that by adducing the material or efficient cause of the end finds out the only suitable way to achieve it. Knowledge of and reference to efficient and material causes are key in making choices. But they are equally important, or perhaps even more so, in formulating prescriptions. To tell other people what they ought to do, here and now or in recurring circumstances, means to exercise an authority that rests on knowledge of things. In some cases, however, and especially within a political context, it is a proof of practical wisdom, since it shows that one regards the ends that are subordinate to the good of the State as the “efficient” and “material” causes of the good of the State.

# Deliberation and Prescription

## 1 Preliminary Remarks: Deliberation as Procedural Reasoning

I hope to show, in the following pages, that deliberation actually differs from theoretical or scientific reasoning for reasons other than those leading Aristotle to distinguish between theoretical, practical and productive sciences. Sciences are classified by Aristotle according to their respective objects. They are distinct from each other because the principle of theoretical sciences resides in their objects of inquiry, whereas the principle of practical and productive sciences resides not in the objects of knowledge but in the agents and producers.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, it is correct to claim that the objects of practical reason are actions and those of productive reason productions, whereas theoretical reason concerns itself with true and necessary beings, or with natural ones. It is clear, however, that for Aristotle thinking is *practical* when it is for the sake of something: νοῦς δὲ ὁ ἔνεκά του λογιζόμενος καὶ ὁ πρακτικός.<sup>2</sup> Its difference from theoretical thinking lies in its end, which is determined by desire. Desire does not necessarily coincide with appetite (ἐπιθυμία). It may be volition (βούλησις), i.e. the purpose to achieve a certain goal through a plan of action. Whereas theoretical thinking has its limit in itself, practical thinking has its limit in something else.<sup>3</sup>

Practical reasoning indicates a procedure, assuming we have a purpose to realize, an end to achieve. The question practical reasoning has to answer is: *how?* (πῶς), not *what is it?* (τί ἐστὶ) or *why?* (διὰ τι). Practical reasoning does not define the essence of things, nor does it discover their causes. Rather, it outlines a procedure, whatever the domain that requires the application of a

1 Cf. *Metaph.* 1025b18–28; *Metaph.* 1064a10–15.

2 *De an.* 433a14; on the difficulties raised by this apparently innocuous sentence, see A.W. Price, “Aristotle’s Conception of Practical Thinking”, in C. Sandis (ed.), *New Essays on the Explanation of Action*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2008, 384–395. See also *Eth. nic.* 1139a35–36; the distinction of reason into theoretical and practical seems to be a standard one, probably also because it comes from dialectical and diairetic exercises: see *Aristot. Polit.* 1333a24–25: “This principle, too, in our ordinary way of making the division (καθ’ ὃν περ εἰώθαμεν τρόπον διαίρειν), is divided into two kinds, for there is a practical and a speculative principle”.

3 *De an.* 407a23–25: “All practical processes of thinking have limits—they all go on for the sake of something else, and all theoretical processes come to a close in the same way as accounts do”.

specific procedure. In fact, procedural reasoning<sup>4</sup> concerns not only human action, but also any domain requiring a principle that resides in the reasoning agent, rather than in the matter of the reasoning. This is what happens in some mathematical processes, to which Aristotle compares deliberation. If we want to demonstrate that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles, we have to find a suitable way of verifying what we have assumed as a hypothesis (e.g. drawing a line parallel to one of the sides of the triangle). The “choice” of drawing the parallel line resides in the reasoning subject, not in the notion of the triangle. It would be wrong to conclude from this that the reasoning that calculates the sum of the angles of a triangle is “practical”, if by “practical” we mean something related to human action, as Aristotle normally does using the adjective *πρακτικός*.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, that type of reasoning can be more precisely defined as *procedural*, since it answers the question: *how can I show that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles?*, and allows us to satisfy the hypothesis. On the other hand, when we want to answer such questions as *what is courage?* and *why did someone act that way?*, the reasoning we conduct in order to define a virtue or explain the cause of a human action is not procedural, but of a different kind (we might say that it is a definitional process or a causal reasoning). Since it does not always concern necessary and universal objects, this way of reasoning is not scientific in the same way as *λόγοι ἀκριβεῖς*. However, it is analogous to theoretical thinking in asking the *what* and the *why*, although it is about *πρακτά*.

4 I use this expression just in order to make my interpretation clear enough, and as an echo of the terminology that various scholars use when treating either Aristotle's conception of deliberation (cf. e.g. S. Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, OUP, Oxford-New York 1991, 78 f. and 185; more recently D. Frede, “Determining the Good in Action. Wish, Deliberation, and Choice”, in J. Aufderheide-R.M. Bader (eds.), *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, OUP, Oxford 2015, 19 f., and D. Charles, “Aristotle on the Highest Good. A New Approach”, *ibidem*, 66); or Aristotle's theory of virtue as a mean (see e.g. J.O. Urmson, “Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean”, in A. Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., 162 f.; more recently L. Brown, “Why Is Aristotle's Virtue of Character a Mean? Taking Aristotle at His Word (*NE* ii 6)”, in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, cit., 75; and P. Gottlieb, *The Virtue of Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., 19, 36, and 128). I concede that we cannot find in Aristotle's passages about deliberation any formula of which “procedural reasoning” is a plausible translation: in several ethical texts (*Eth. eud.* 1214a14, 1216b35, b39; *Eth. nic.* 1094a1, b11, 1098a29, 129a6) Aristotle uses the term *μέθοδος*, but in none of those passages is deliberation involved. However, my employment of the term “procedural” in this context is justified by the use of the term *προβληματικός* attested in mathematical literature of the IV century to describe the hypothetical process, see *infra*, pp. 116–120.

5 Cf. especially *De an.* 433a14–17; *Eth. eud.* 1222a6–8; 1247a8; 1248b36; *Eth. nic.* 1098a3; 1099b32; 1104b28; 1124b25; 1137b35; 1139a27; a36, etc.; *Metaph.* 993b21–23, etc.

Procedural reasoning is also a kind of “backwards” reasoning: after *posing* an end (θέσις<sup>6</sup>) to achieve in the future as its starting-point procedural reasoning searches for all the conditions that must be fulfilled for the attainment of that end. Once the backwards movement has come to its final stage, reasoning subjects can start a course of action that will lead them to achieve the object of their volition by going through the stages of the reasoning in the opposite direction. This is why procedural reasoning is a kind of *problematic* reasoning: it assumes a thesis not as a definition or an axiom, but in the form of a hypothesis. Aristotle claims that the end deliberative reasoning starts from is like a ὑπόθεσις.<sup>7</sup> A hypothesis is each of the alternatives of the contradiction that make up a πρόβλημα.<sup>8</sup> After one of the alternatives of the πρόβλημα has been assumed, procedural reasoning searches for either the confirmation or the feasibility of what the hypothesis asserts. In the passages where he speaks about deliberation, Aristotle uses the problematic form to describe the act of positing both the end from which deliberation starts and each of the steps that follow the positing of the end, for each of these steps is an intermediate end and therefore a new πρόβλημα.<sup>9</sup> To understand that the form of deliberative reasoning does not depend on the fact that it is about human actions, but on the fact that it searches for a procedure to adopt, we have to consider the comparison between deliberation and *diagramma*,<sup>10</sup> i.e. the kind of mathematical reasoning that assumes the property of a certain geometrical figure and searches for a procedure to demonstrate that the property belongs to that figure. Mathematicians reason “backwards”, i.e. they identify the conditions allowing them to demonstrate that the property belongs to the given figure, until they come across some element they can draw. What Aristotle means here is that mathematicians, whose domain is a theoretical science, adopt a calculating procedure in order to attain their goal. That is to say, they have an “end” too, and they develop a kind of reasoning that can answer the question *how*?

The features of procedural reasoning are closely linked to some extremely important notions on which it is useful to dwell a little, given their significance

6 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 112b15 (θέμενοι τὸ τέλος ...).

7 *Eth. eud.* 1227a9.

8 *An. post.* 72a18–20; *Top.* 101b13–15, b31–33. In the *Topics* passages, Aristotle explains that a πρόβλημα is a question about whether a genus or a definition or a property or an accident belongs to a certain subject, and that it differs from a πρότασις by the way they are formulated: a πρότασις expresses a predication in the form of a question (“Is two-footed terrestrial animal the definition of man?”), whereas a πρόβλημα is the same question in the form of a contradiction (“Is two-footed terrestrial animal the definition of man, or not?”).

9 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1226b24; 1227b25–28.

10 *Eth. nic.* 112b20–21.

in the theory of deliberation and prescription. These notions are action (πρᾶξις), production (ποίησις), and generation (γένεσις), the latter being the genus production belongs to. They are related to deliberation insofar as they explain the way it works. Deliberation is an inquiry into an object that does not exist actually, but only potentially. This object is the end, i.e. a certain good we desire to possess or a certain state of affairs that we want to come about. The end is delineated by the soul, through reasoning and imagination, *before* deliberation. Deliberation drafts a plan of action whose course, from a logical and temporal point of view, is exactly the opposite of that of inquiry. The aim of deliberation, as well as of other kinds of procedural reasoning,<sup>11</sup> is the generation of the object imagined by the soul. The kind of generation that deliberation originates is a production in technical or artistic fields, a praxis in other domains of human action.

Some passages of the *Eudemian Ethics* are particularly significant:

Now about the end no one deliberates (this being fixed for everyone), but about that which tends to it—whether this or that tends to it, and—supposing this or that resolved on—how it is to be brought about. All consider this till they have brought the beginning of the process to a point in their own power.<sup>12</sup>

To attain the end there may be not just one way, but many different ones. Once we have identified the way we consider to be the best (at least from a certain point of view, e.g. the quickest, the easiest, the noblest, etc.), we will have to find out the best way to find out the way that makes it immediately possible to attain the end, and so on, until we come to the state the deliberating subject is in. So, two distinct intellectual operations are involved in deliberation. One operation is always regressive and consists in grasping a means-end relationship. This operation is to be repeated for each intermediate step existing between the remote end and the agent desiring it. The means-end relationship is based on the finding of a material or efficient cause: to achieve a certain end, I search for

11 Although theoretical, practical and productive sciences differ from each other in virtue of their respective objects, it is nonetheless possible to apply the different types of reasoning (i.e. scientific and procedural) to the objects of all kinds of sciences. Consequently, we can reason in order to find out a “praxis” in a theoretical context as well as inquire into the essence and cause of practical notions.

12 *Eth. eud.* 1226b10–13: Περί μὲν δὴ τοῦ τέλους οὐδεὶς βουλευέται, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο κείται πάσι, περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰς τοῦτο τεινόντων, πότερον τόδε ἢ τόδε συντείνει, ἢ δεδογμένου τοῦτο πῶς ἔσται. βουλευόμεθα δὲ τοῦτο πάντες, ἕως ἂν εἰς ἡμᾶς ἀναγάγωμεν τῆς γενέσεως τὴν ἀρχήν.

something that either constitutes a component of, or brings about the end. The other intellectual operation is the expression of a preference, and consists in choosing (προαίρεῖσθαι) between several options that all seem to be conducive to the end.<sup>13</sup> The finding of the efficient cause plays a more prominent role here: the choice between two or more options depends on the ability to assess the respective effectiveness of the different options. If the effectiveness is equal, other aspects will prevail, such as the greater accessibility or pleasantness of a procedure.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the comparison between several options concerns not only the final choice (προαίρεσις), but also every stage of deliberative reasoning, as well as the means-end relationship. The importance of the second operation is confirmed by Aristotle's references to it.<sup>15</sup> It is not an essential component of the *procedural* inquiry, as is shown by the fact that the comparison between different options has apparently no place in mathematical procedural reasoning. In the field of human action, however, the comparison between different options plays a key role for a simple reason: in this domain, things are not dictated by necessity or a regularity comparable to that of natural events.<sup>16</sup>

In the passage quoted above a number of typical deliberation-related terms occur: the adverb πῶς, indicating the procedural goal of this kind of reasoning; the verb ἀνάγειν, referring to the “backwards” movement; and the noun γέनेσις,

13 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1226a27–28; b6–15; *Eth. nic.* 112b15–16; 28–30.

14 Cf., e.g., *Eth. nic.* 112b15–18: “Having set the end they consider how and by what means it is to be attained; and if it seems to be produced by several means they consider by which it is most easily and best (διὰ τίνος ῥᾶστα καὶ κάλλιστα) produced, while if it is achieved by one only they consider how it will be achieved by this and by what means this will be achieved ...”

15 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1226a8–12, and 1226b6–7: προαίρεσις is αἵρεσις ἐτέρου πρὸ ἐτέρου; b11: deliberation is a search aimed at establishing “whether this or that tends to it (πότερον τόδε ἢ τόδε συντείνει)”.

16 On this aspect, see S. Bobzien, “Choice and Moral Responsibility (NE iii 1–5)”, *cit.*, 81–109, esp. 91f.: “Deliberation and choice both require that the agent has alternative options. It is an essential feature of the things we deliberate about, and that are in our power, that they come in pairs ... Aristotle uses the phrase “in our power” also to express this necessary feature of human agency. We articulate this by saying that he uses the expression as two-sided. That is, he assumes the following principle: if it is in the agent's power to do something, then it is also in the agent's power not to do it, and vice versa”. In my view, this interpretation should imply that ‘doing x’ and ‘not doing x’, in very ordinary practice, occurs also as ‘doing x or doing y’ (‘should I take the bus or the car?’), where y is meant as anything except x. A different interpretation is in K.M. Nielsen, “Deliberation as Inquiry: Aristotle's Alternative to the Presumption of Open Alternatives”, *Philosophical Review*, 120, 2011, 383–421, who offers a reading of Aristotle's deliberation according to a hypothetical, and non-comparative, model.

indicating the completion of the deliberative plan and the beginning of the course of action. Aristotle goes back to procedural reasoning and its analogy with hypotheses in theoretical science:

But since in deliberating one always deliberates for the sake of some end, and he who deliberates has always an aim by reference to which he judges what is expedient, no one deliberates about the end; this is the starting-point and assumption, like the assumptions in theoretical science (we have spoken about this briefly in the beginning of this work and minutely in the *Analytics*). Everyone's inquiry, whether made with or without art, is about what tends to the end, e.g. whether they shall go to war or not, when this is what they are deliberating about. But the cause or end will come first, e.g. wealth, pleasure, or anything else of the sort that happens to be our object. For the man deliberating deliberates if he has considered, from the point of view of the end, what conduces to bringing the end within his own action, or what he at present can do towards the object.<sup>17</sup>

The above passage highlights an important and controversial aspect of deliberation, i.e. that we deliberate for the sake of the end, but not about it. Deliberation is a search for suitable means to achieve an end the assumption of which is not in question. The sentence “the cause or end will come *first*” means that deliberative reasoning takes the end as its premise or starting-point, not that deliberation can also concern the end. Aristotle considers the end as an immediate premise, as an assumption. Here is what he claims a few lines further down, at 1227b25–33 (in a context where his main point is that the end is right because of virtue, not deliberative reasoning):

For the doctor does not ask whether one ought to be in health or not, but whether one ought to walk or not; nor does the trainer ask whether one ought to be in good condition or not, but whether one should wrestle or not. And similarly no art asks questions about the end; for as in theoretic

17 *Eth. eud.* 1227a6–18: ἐπεὶ δὲ βουλευέται αἰεὶ ὁ βουλευόμενος ἕνεκα τινός, καὶ ἐστὶ σκοπὸς τις αἰεὶ τῷ βουλευομένῳ πρὸς ὃν σκοπεῖ τὸ συμφέρον, περὶ μὲν τοῦ τέλους οὐθεὶς βουλευέται, ἀλλὰ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἀρχὴ καὶ ὑπόθεσις, ὥσπερ ἐν ταῖς θεωρητικαῖς ἐπιστήμαις ὑποθέσεις (εἴρηται δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἐν ἀρχῇ βραχέως, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἀναλυτικοῖς δι' ἀκριβείας), περὶ δὲ τῶν πρὸς τὸ τέλος φερόντων ἡ σκέψις καὶ μετὰ τέχνης καὶ ἄνευ τέχνης πᾶσιν ἐστὶν, οἷον εἰ πολεμῶσιν ἢ μὴ πολεμῶσιν τοῦτο βουλευομένοις. ἐκ προτέρου δὲ μᾶλλον ἔσται τὸ δι' ὃ, τοῦτ' ἐστὶ τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα, οἷον πλοῦτος ἢ ἡδονὴ ἢ τι ἄλλο τοιοῦτον ὃ τυγχάνει οὐ ἕνεκα. βουλευέται γὰρ ὁ βουλευόμενος, εἰ ἀπὸ τοῦ τέλους ἔσκεπται, ὃ τι ἐκεῖ συντείνει ὅπως εἰς αὐτὸν ἀγάγῃ, ἢ αὐτὸς δύναται πρὸς τὸ τέλος.

cal sciences the assumptions are our starting-points, so in the productive the end is starting-point and assumed. E.g. we reason that since this body is to be made healthy, therefore so and so must be found in it if health is to be had—just as in geometry we argue, if the angles of the triangle are equal to two right angles, then so and so must be the case. The end aimed at is, then, the starting-point of our thought, the end of our thought the starting-point of action.

Aristotle goes back to this issue several times.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, we have seen that according to various interpreters Aristotle would understand deliberation as reasoning that specifies and defines the notion of the end. Such seems to be the case of the “healthy subject” (τὸ ὑγιές) of *Metaph.* 1032b5 ff., which is meant as a goal attained by a deliberative reasoning starting with the analysis of the notion of health (cf. 1032b6–7: ἐπειδὴ τοδὶ ὑγίεια, ἀνάγκη εἰ ὑγιές ἔσται τοδὶ ὑπάρξαι, οἷον ὁμαλότῃτα, εἰ δὲ τοῦτο ...). In this way, “things in relation to the end” (τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος) would not be mere tools to attain the end, but components of its nature and essence. In my view, the possibility that deliberation in itself, as a procedural reasoning, is *about* the end has to be rejected.<sup>19</sup> Aristotle is certainly committed to the thesis that what makes deliberation possible is also the knowledge of the essence of the end. In this case, the elements that define the notion of the end are to be considered and, in a sense, deliberated about, in that they are either material conditions or efficient causes of the end. This is the case of the balance of humours or bodily heat, at *Metaph.* 1032b6–7, which are both constitutive elements of the notion of health and, therefore, conditions that the doctor wants to bring about in order to restore health. Some constitutive elements of the essence of a particular end are also conditions of its existence; therefore, if these conditions can be established through actions within the agent’s power (as in the case of a medical treatment re-establishing a healthy state), they may be considered as suitable means to

18 See e.g. *Eth. eud.* 1226a7–8; 1226b10–12; *Eth. nic.* 1112b12–16, b33–34.

19 This interpretation (on which see *supra*, p. 70 ff.) is contested by R. Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, PUP, Princeton 1989, 200, and reaffirmed by D. Bostock, *Aristotle’s Ethics*, OUP, Oxford 2000, repr. 2006, 94–98, and A. Merker, *Le principe de l’action humaine selon Démosthène et Aristote. Haïresis—Prohaïresis*, LBL, Paris 2016, 320 f. D. Cammack, “Aristotle’s Denial of Deliberation about Ends”, *Polis. The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought*, 30 (2013), 228–250, provides a comprehensive survey of positions on this issue and a fresh reconsideration of deliberation as it appears in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, *Politics*, and *Ethics*. She concludes with the claim that Aristotle’s denial of deliberation about ends is totally coherent with Aristotle’s idea that we do not choose our ends at all (cf. 248 f.).



achieve the end. To deliberate about these elements does not mean to deliberate *about* the end, but rather for the sake of it.

To conclude my brief discussion of the *Eudemian Ethics* passage cited above (1227a6–18), I will now consider Aristotle's remark that all men deliberate about what leads to the end *either with or without art* (καὶ μετὰ τέχνης καὶ ἄνευ τέχνης). What is Aristotle's point here? I think the word τέχνη refers to the possession of rules of production or execution that are necessary for the attainment of the end, but not for deliberation. When we have concluded our deliberative reasoning, the plan of action might require some acts that cannot be performed by those who have deliberated. For example, if we have deliberated to get to some place by a means of transport, we may need someone to drive the means of transport for us. On the other hand, those who perform the act might have taken no part in the process of deliberation, either because they lacked knowledge of the end or for some other reason. The deliberating subjects must know, among the acts that are necessary to achieve the end, all those they can perform themselves as well as a good deal of those they cannot or do not want to perform themselves, for without such knowledge they would not be able to draft a plan of action. This is a typical situation for all the people who exert a prescriptive authority, give rules of conduct, or issue particular orders for the sake of a certain end. Although people who exert prescriptive authority know what general conditions are to be satisfied in order to attain the end, they do not bring them about, because they either cannot or do not want to, unless they are forced to. According to Aristotle, this is the case of the master with respect to his servants,<sup>20</sup> and, probably, also of the commander with respect to the lookout man, or the horseman and the musician with respect to the saddler and the flute-maker.<sup>21</sup>

So, Aristotle's claim, at *Eth. eud.* 1227a12–13, that people deliberate whether or not to make war both μετὰ τέχνης and ἄνευ τέχνης, should be interpreted in the following way. When the members of an assembly, or another kind of deliberating organ, deliberate whether or not to make war, they set themselves as a goal the solution of a conflict between a foreign country and their own; that is to say, they set themselves an end requiring the possession of political sci-

20 See *Polit.* 1277a33–b7; see also *Polit.* 1255b33–37, 1256a6–9.

21 On the lookout man and other different roles in the art of navigation, such as “rower” and “pilot”, cf. *Polit.* 1276b24; for the relationship between the saddler and the rider, cf. *Eth. eud.* 1219b3–4, a passage introducing the difference between the practical art, which consists in using products, and productive art, which is inferior to the former; *Eth. nic.* 1094a11, where Aristotle explains that the hierarchy of arts and activities depends on the hierarchy of ends.

ence, not military competence. On the other hand, we might add that those possessing military competence do not necessarily take part in the process of deliberation about war, but often just carry out what the assembly and deliberating organs have deliberated and prescribed them.

Deliberation is an instance of procedural reasoning because it presupposes an end and searches for the suitable means to achieve it. It is a kind of hypothetical reasoning insofar as those who deliberate assume a certain good as achieved, just as mathematicians assume a geometrical truth and then search for the way to construct it. Deliberation is therefore a kind of ἐξ ὑποθέσεως reasoning.

## 2 The Structure of Deliberation

To understand the structure of deliberative reasoning two passages are particularly important: *Eth. nic.* 1112a34–b24 and *Metaph.* 1032a32–b21. I begin with the first.

In the case of exact and self-contained sciences there is no deliberation, e.g. about the letters of the alphabet (for we have no doubt how they should be written); but the things that are brought about by our own efforts, but not always in the same way, are the things about which we deliberate, e.g. questions of medical treatment or of money-making. And we do so more in the case of the art of navigation than in that of gymnastics, inasmuch as it has been less exactly worked out, and again about other things in the same ratio, and more also in the case of the arts than in that of the sciences; for we have more doubt about the former. Deliberation is concerned with things that happen in a certain way for the most part, but in which the event is obscure, and with things in which it is indeterminate ... We deliberate not about ends but about what contributes to ends. For a doctor does not deliberate whether he shall heal, nor an orator whether he shall convince, nor a statesman whether he shall produce law and order, nor does anyone else deliberate about his end. Having set the end they consider how and by what means it is to be attained; and if it seems to be produced by several means they consider by which it is most easily and best produced, while if it is achieved by one only they consider how it will be achieved by this and by what means this will be achieved, till they come to the first cause, which in the order of discovery is last. For the person who deliberates seems to inquire and analyse in the way described as though he were analysing a geometrical construction

(not all inquiry appears to be deliberation—for instance mathematical inquiries—but all deliberation is inquiry), and what is last in the order of analysis seems to be first in the order of becoming.<sup>22</sup>

transl. by W.D. ROSS

Aristotle views deliberation as closely linked to doubt. We deliberate when we are uncertain (διστάζομεν); we deliberate about things whose outcome is obscure (ἀδῆλοις δὲ πῶς ἀποβήσεται) and whose nature is indeterminate (ἀδιόριστον).<sup>23</sup> Not all actions are characterized by uncertainty, as shows the case of writing, which is not the object of deliberation. Actions that are indeed the object of deliberation are so in varying degrees, since arts are more indeterminate than sciences, and some arts are more indeterminate than others. Shortly after emphasizing the connection between deliberation and doubt, Aristotle repeats that we deliberate about the means leading to an end, not about the end. This confirms that: 1) deliberation is not in itself a kind of reasoning about the end, since the end is certain and clear in the soul of the deliberating subject, whereas what is uncertain is its attainment and the best way to attain it; 2) in most cases, deliberation is an operation which is first comparative and then

22 Καὶ περὶ μὲν τὰς ἀκριβεῖς καὶ αὐτάρκεις τῶν ἐπιστημῶν οὐκ ἔστι βουλή, οἷον περὶ γραμμάτων (οὐ γὰρ διστάζομεν πῶς γραπτέον)· ἀλλ' ὅσα γίνεται δι' ἡμῶν, μὴ ὡσαύτως δ' αἰεὶ, περὶ τούτων βουλευόμεθα, οἷον περὶ τῶν κατ' ἰατρικὴν καὶ χρηματιστικὴν, καὶ περὶ κυβερνητικὴν μᾶλλον ἢ γυμναστικὴν, ὅσα ἤττον διηκριβίζονται, καὶ ἔτι περὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ὁμοίως, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ περὶ τὰς τέχνας ἢ τὰς ἐπιστήμας· μᾶλλον γὰρ περὶ ταύτας διστάζομεν. τὸ βουλευέσθαι δὲ ἐν τοῖς ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ, ἀδῆλοις δὲ πῶς ἀποβήσεται, καὶ ἐν οἷς ἀδιόριστον. συμβούλους δὲ παραλαμβάνομεν εἰς τὰ μεγάλα ... Βουλευόμεθα δ' οὐ περὶ τῶν τελῶν ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν πρὸς τὰ τέλη. οὕτε γὰρ ἰατρός βουλευεται εἰ ὑγιᾶσει, οὕτε ῥήτωρ εἰ πείσει, οὕτε πολιτικός εἰ εὐνομίαν ποιήσει, οὐδὲ τῶν λοιπῶν οὐδεὶς περὶ τοῦ τέλους· ἀλλὰ θέμενοι τὸ τέλος τὸ πῶς καὶ διὰ τίνων ἔσται σκοποῦσι· καὶ διὰ πλείονων μὲν φαινομένου γίνεσθαι ἔσται σκοποῦσι· καὶ διὰ πλείονων μὲν φαινομένου γίνεσθαι διὰ τίνος ῥᾶστα καὶ κάλλιστα ἐπισκοποῦσι, δι' ἑνὸς δ' ἐπιτελουμένου πῶς διὰ τούτου ἔσται κακῆϊνο διὰ τίνος, ἕως ἂν ἔλθωσιν ἐπὶ τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον, ὃ ἐν τῇ εὐρέσει ἔσχατόν ἐστιν. ὁ γὰρ βουλευόμενος ἔοικε ζητεῖν καὶ ἀναλύειν τὸν εἰρημένον τρόπον ὥσπερ διάγραμμα (φαίνεται δ' ἡ μὲν ζήτησις οὐ πᾶσα εἶναι βούλευσις, οἷον αἱ μαθηματικά, ἡ δὲ βούλευσις πᾶσα ζήτησις), καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον ἐν τῇ ἀναλύσει πρῶτον εἶναι ἐν τῇ γενέσει.

23 The ἀδιόριστον, the indeterminate character of the object of deliberation, distinguishes it from the object of choice, cf. *Eth. nic.* 1112b9. The object of choice is included in an established plan of action. On this point, see S. Bobzien, "Choice and Moral Responsibility", cit., 93, D. Cammack, *art. cit.*, 234, J. Moss, "Right Reason in Plato and Aristotle", cit., 221. The notion of the *indeterminate* is of great importance not only from the point of view of deliberation but also from that of prescription. We should remember that the essence of the virtuous standard consists in finding out the *horos* in every domain of action. The criterion of right reason and mean being indeterminate, and therefore insufficient for prescribing the appropriate action in each situation, it is necessary to determine, case by case, the precise limits of action.

regressive. After we have assumed an end, there seem to be a number of ways to achieve it. It is therefore necessary to select one of them, and this becomes itself an end, although only with respect to the ultimate end which represents the starting-point of the process of deliberation. This marks the beginning of the second operation, i.e. regressive reasoning, which is closely linked to the first, for each of the deliberated means raises, in turn, the question as to the best way to achieve it. So, going back from a certain objective to its preliminary condition, we come to an act the deliberator can accomplish, thereby starting the realization of the deliberated plan.

Aristotle highlights a double logical process involving various critical faculties. The first process assesses synchronically the different possibilities to attain the end. It resorts to imagination, φαντασία, especially in its deliberative form; to σύνεσις or sagacity; and to perception of what is useful to achieve the end. The second process is diachronic. It links actions to their objectives according to the means-end relationship, as well as inferring the consequences of a certain action through the knowledge of the causes. The comparative process does not only compare the different ways through which an end can be achieved. It also considers the different situations and circumstances in which the deliberating subjects will have to put their deliberation into practice. This aspect distinguishes deliberation from the kind of procedural reasoning taking place in theoretical sciences, where calculating reason (τὸ λογιστικόν) searches for a logico-scientific procedure allowing it to satisfy its starting assumption.<sup>24</sup> It is not very plausible that, in a theoretical science such as geometry, the starting assumption, as well as the conditions that are posited along the way, can be satisfied in several different ways. Although this does happen, as when we come to the solution of a calculus or measuring problem through different procedures, these procedures are ever valid logical operations. On the other hand, deliberation finds its way through different practical options whose effectiveness varies according to the circumstances. This is the meaning of Aristotle's remark, in the passage cited above (at 1112b21–23), that all deliberation is an inquiry, but not every inquiry is deliberation. Mathematical inquiries and deliberation *do not* differ from each other with respect to regressive reasoning. As Aristotle claims in lines 19–20, those who deliberate also search for an antecedent, until they come to the final term of their inquiry, the ἔσχατον, which coincides with the beginning of the course of actions. In this, deliberation is just like geometrical analysis, even if the single stages of geometrical analysis do not undergo a comparative assessment.

24 See *supra*, p. 95, and cf. *Eth. nic.* 1139a5–14; *De an.* 432b5–6, b26–27.

The reverse process to deliberation is generation. The link between generation and deliberation is made clear in *Metaph.* 1032a32–b21, my second passage. In this text, Aristotle explains that *ποίησις* depends on the presence of a form in the mind (*εἶδος ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ*) of the artist. The form in the mind of the artist corresponds to the essence of the end, and therefore is the formal and final cause of the whole deliberative and productive process:

From art proceed the things of which the form is in the mind. (By form I mean the essence of each thing and its primary substance.) ... The healthy subject, then, is produced as the result of the following train of thought: since this is health, if the subject is to be healthy this must first be present, e.g. a uniform state of body, and if this is to be present, there must be heat; and the physician goes on thinking thus until he brings the matter to a final step which he himself can take. Then the process from this point onward, i.e. the process towards health, is called a 'making'. Therefore it follows that in a sense health comes from health and house from house, that with matter from that without matter; for the medical art and the building art are the form of health and of the house ... Of productions and movements one part is called thinking and the other making,—that which proceeds from the starting-point and the form is thinking, and that which proceeds from the final step of the thinking is making. And each of the intermediate steps is taken in the same way. I mean, for instance, if the subject is to be healthy his bodily state must be made uniform. What then does being made uniform imply? This or that. And this depends on his being made warm. What does this imply? Something else. And this something is present potentially; and what is present potentially is already in the physician's power.<sup>25</sup>

25 *Metaph.* 1032b1–22: ἀπὸ τέχνης δὲ γίγνεται ὅσων τὸ εἶδος ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ (εἶδος δὲ λέγω τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἐκάστου καὶ τὴν πρώτην οὐσίαν) ... γίγνεται δὲ τὸ ὑγιὲς νοήσαντος οὕτως· ἐπειδὴ τοδὶ ὑγίεια, ἀνάγκη εἰ ὑγιὲς ἔσται τοδὶ ὑπάρξει, οἷον ὁμαλότητα, εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, θερμότητα· καὶ οὕτως αἰ νοεῖ, ἕως ἂν ἀνάγκη εἰς τοῦτο ὃ αὐτὸς δύναται ἔσχατον ποιεῖν. εἴτα ἥδη ἡ ἀπὸ τοῦτου κίνησις ποίησις καλεῖται, ἡ ἐπὶ τὸ ὑγιαίνειν. ὥστε συμβαίνει τρόπον τινὰ τὴν ὑγίειαν ἐξ ὑγείας γίνεσθαι καὶ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐξ οἰκίας, τῆς ἀνευ ὕλης τὴν ἔχουσαν ὕλην· ἡ γὰρ ἰατρικὴ ἔστι καὶ ἡ οἰκοδομικὴ τὸ εἶδος τῆς ὑγείας καὶ τῆς οἰκίας ... Τῶν δὲ γενέσεων καὶ κινήσεων ἡ μὲν νόσις καλεῖται ἡ δὲ ποίησις, ἡ μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ τοῦ εἶδους νόσις ἡ δ' ἀπὸ τοῦ τελευταίου τῆς νοήσεως ποίησις. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν μεταξὺ ἕκαστον γίγνεται. λέγω δ' οἷον εἰ ὑγιαίνει, δεῖ αὖ ὁμαλυνθῆναι. τί οὖν ἐστὶ τὸ ὁμαλυνθῆναι; τοδὶ, τοῦτο δ' ἔσται εἰ θερμανθήσεται. τοῦτο δὲ τί ἐστι; τοδὶ. ὑπάρχει δὲ τοδὶ δυνάμει· τοῦτο δὲ ἥδη ἐπ' αὐτῷ.

The words “since this is health (ἐπειδὴ τοδὶ ὑγίεια)” allude to the form in the mind of the artist, i.e. the knowledge of the notion of the end that someone wants to attain. The sentences starting with “if” (“if the subject is to be healthy”, “if this is to be present”) indicate the end deliberation starts from (i.e. recovery) and the intermediate ends (the balance of humours, bodily heat, etc.), expressed in a hypothetical form. The form in the mind of the artist is the hypothesis and the ultimate end of generation (supposing that health is *x*, when we have come to realize *x*, we have satisfied the hypothesis).<sup>26</sup> The *Metaphysics* passage shows that, for Aristotle, procedural reasoning must be able to use the analysis of the essence of what is assumed as a hypothesis. In various cases of deliberation, too, we may need to know the essence of the end we want to realize and possess its definition. Moreover, since the search for means suited to the end has to be repeated for every single stage of deliberation—means are something like intermediate ends (μεταξύ)—, we must conclude that the knowledge of the essence is also fundamental for the all notions corresponding to the intermediate ends. The knowledge of the essence of all the notions involved in deliberative reasoning and the analysis that accompanies it allow us to move backwards to the state of the deliberating subject and, more precisely, to something that is “present potentially (ὑπάρχει δὲ τοδὶ δυνάμει)”, i.e. an action the deliberating subject can perform. The reference to something that is “present potentially” deserves some comment. If we have sufficient knowledge of the causes, can we identify the procedure to achieve a certain end, even if we do not act? For it is plausible that we deliberate correctly yet fail to act. We fail to

26 A different reading of the two passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Metaphysics* is offered by K.M. Nielsen, “Deliberation as Inquiry”, cit., esp. 402: “Nowhere in the process of mapping out the causal chains that lead back from the end—health—to an act that is up to him does Aristotle’s doctor pause to consider alternative means to the same end ... At most, deliberation on the Aristotelian model would require weighing action against inaction if we determine that the act required for some reason exacts a price too steep relative to the goal ... Taking no action at all could count as an “alternative” course of action. But Aristotle never suggests that in order to deliberate we must of necessity weigh action against inaction or action against action”. In my view, the alternative between action and inaction is the logical structure into which an ordinary spectrum of practical options can be framed. The choice among rubbing and other possible methods of cure and producing heat, like hot baths, warm blankets, and so on, is, logically, the choice between rubbing and non-rubbing, which is not necessarily the same as either rubbing or *doing nothing*. In other words, Aristotle evokes, it seems to me, the logical structure of a *problema*, (cf. *Top.* 101b31–32) and the example of *Metaphysics* might be formulated as follows: “It is better to rub the patient *rather than not* (that is: rather than resorting to other methods of cure and producing heat)”. Recently Jozef Müller, “Practical and Productive Thinking in Aristotle”, *Phronesis*, 63 (2018), 148–175, when arguing in favour of the distinction between practical and productive reasoning, denies that the *Metaphysics* passage concerns deliberation.

act either because of an accidental obstacle or because we cannot act ourselves or for some other reason. This being so, the words “this is present potentially; and what is present potentially is already in the physician’s power” indicate the conclusion of the procedural inference in the sense that we have made sure the action is possible. The case is different if the deliberating subjects draw the conclusion of the deliberative inference, yet fail to act after realizing that the last step is not “present potentially”, i.e. is not among the actions they are able to perform.

In both his *Ethics* Aristotle argues that we only deliberate about what depends on us. This means we do not deliberate about eternal and necessary objects, nor about the entities that are ruled by natural laws. In addition, we do not deliberate about all the things related to human action: for instance, we do not deliberate about India (*Eth. eud.* 1226a29) or “about the best constitution for the Scythians” (*Eth. nic.* 112a28–29). These two examples could suggest that we never deliberate about what we know we cannot directly influence. This interpretation, however, is too restrictive. It also fails to account for the final words of the *Metaphysics* passage cited above (“this is present potentially ...”), which seems to consider the possibility that we deliberate in order to verify whether the conditions for action exist. If these conditions are not there, this does not mean that our deliberation has been incorrect or even superfluous. Aristotle certainly believed that some people deliberate although they know they will not put into practice what follows from their deliberation. The sense of the *Ethics* examples is that we do not deliberate about what we desire neither in itself nor for the sake of something else; or that we do not deliberate when we think that the outcome of our deliberation, though corresponding in a general way to our desire, will not be put into practice by ourselves or someone else (e.g. if we wished that the Scythians had a good constitution, or all wars in the world stopped). What the account of deliberative reasoning in *Metaph.* 1032b15–21 suggests is rather that we deliberate with a view to the object of our volition, and that through deliberative reasoning we assess the possibility of achieving somehow what we want. If we deliberate and come to a conclusion and yet fail to act directly ourselves, it is not only because of some obstacle but because someone else, who did not deliberate, performs the deliberated action. This means the deliberated action can be prescribed to someone else.

In a sense, prescription is itself an action and helps us attain our desired end, just like an action we perform ourselves.

### 3 The Hypothetical Method

What is the sense of Aristotle's claim that the end is the ἀρχή of deliberation in the way a hypothesis is in theoretical science (*Eth. eud.* 1227a8–9), and that it plays a similar role to that of a διάγραμμα in geometrical analysis (*Eth. nic.* 1112b20–21)? As a rule, *Ethics* interpreters do not pay much attention to the passages where the analogy between end and hypothesis occurs.<sup>27</sup> In my opinion, the analogy deserves serious consideration, for Aristotle views hypothesis as the crucial element in the kind of procedural reasoning to which deliberation belongs. Procedural reasoning aims to establish whether a generation or a production is possible. The generation arising from procedural reasoning is that of a particular object which has been assumed as true or possible. In the domain of theoretical sciences, the kind of hypothetical procedural reasoning Aristotle is referring to is not just that of particular sciences which assume as hypothesis some essential determinations of their objects.<sup>28</sup> It is, above all, the demonstration of such a διάγραμμα as follows: “(It is true that) the sum of the interior angles of a triangle etc.”; or “given a triangle, demonstrate that the sum of its interior angles etc.”<sup>29</sup>

The hypothetical method plays an important role in Aristotle's practical philosophy, as is shown by two *Ethics* passages: *Eth. eud.* 1235b30 and 1238b6. The first occurrence of the term ὑπόθεσις follows the starting point (ἀρχή) that the object of desire and volition is the good or what appears to be good.<sup>30</sup> There follows the assumption of another principle by way of hypothesis:

This being settled, we must make another hypothesis. Of the good some is absolutely good, some good to a particular man, though not absolutely; and the same things are at once absolutely good and absolutely pleasant.

27 Recent scholars have paid more attention to the comparison between deliberation and geometrical analysis, cf. E. Cattanei, “L'immaginario geometrico dell'uomo che delibera. Schemi di esercizio della *phantasia bouleutiké* in Aristotele”, in A. Fermani-M. Migliori (eds.), *Attività e virtù. Anima e corpo in Aristotele*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2009, 83–112; K.M. Nielsen, “Deliberation as Inquiry”, cit.; C. Natali, “The Book on Wisdom”, in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, cit., 192–193.

28 See *Metaph.* 1025b7–12: “All these sciences mark off some particular being—some genus—, and inquire into this, but non into being simply nor qua being, nor do they offer any discussion of the essence of the things of which they treat. But starting from the essence, some making it plain to the senses, others assuming it as a hypothesis, they then demonstrate, more or less cogently, the essential attributes of the genus with which they deal”.

29 See *Metaph.* 1051a20–25; 1086b34–35.

30 *Eth. eud.* 1235b24–26: περί δὴ τούτων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν συγγενῶν τούτοις πειρατέον διορίσαι, λαβοῦσιν ἀρχὴν τήνδε. τὸ γὰρ ὀρεκτὸν καὶ βουλευτὸν ἢ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἢ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν.



For we say that what is advantageous to a body in health is absolutely good for a body, but not what is good for a sick body, such as drugs and the knife.<sup>31</sup>

The two ἀρχαί at issue—i.e. that when we want something, we want it because it is or appears to be good; and that the things which are or appear to be good, can be good in an absolute or relative way—are closely linked. They are the premises from which we infer that a thing can be considered good with respect to a given subject or circumstance. If what is good for a healthy body is absolutely good, what is good for a sick body is only good in relation to the disease. In this passage, however, the term ὑπόθεσις is an alternative for ἀρχή and is used only to indicate a *premise* from which we infer a conclusion, as we find it in *Metaph.* 1025b10 f., not an object whose generation or production we have to outline. This premise is the distinction between absolute and relative goods: as we shall see, of relative goods we can predicate a particular kind of goodness through hypothetical reasoning (i.e. ἐξ ὑποθέσεως).

The formula ἐξ ὑποθέσεως occurs in a passage where Aristotle deals with friendship based on utility, and particularly with the kind of friendship that can develop between the good and the bad:

Also a good person may be a friend to a bad, the bad being of use to the good in relation to the good person's existing choice, the good to the incontinent in relation to his existing choice, and to the bad in relation to his natural choice. And they will wish for their friend what is good, the absolutely good absolutely, and conditionally (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) what is good for the friend ...<sup>32</sup>

The bad person is useful to the good in relation to the latter's choice to morally benefit the former. The good person is useful to both the incontinent (ἀκρατής) and the bad in two different ways: either by correcting the ὑπάρχουσα προαίρεσις of the incontinent or the κατὰ φύσιν προαίρεσις of the bad. The ὑπάρχουσα προαίρεσις is the wrong choice the ἀκρατής makes in conformity with an appetite

31 *Eth. eud.* 1235b30–34: τούτου δὲ διωρισμένου ληπτέον ὑπόθεσιν ἑτέραν. τῶν γὰρ ἀγαθῶν τὰ μὲν ἀπλῶς ἐστὶν ἀγαθὰ, τὰ δὲ τινί, ἀπλῶς δὲ οὐ. καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἀπλῶς ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἀπλῶς ἡδέα. τὰ μὲν γὰρ τῷ ὑγιαίνοντι φαμεν σώματι συμφέροντα ἀπλῶς εἶναι σώματι ἀγαθὰ, τὰ δὲ τῷ κάμνοντι οὐ, οἷον φαρμακείας καὶ τομάς.

32 *Eth. eud.* 1238b1–6: ἐνδέχεται δὲ καὶ τὸν ἐπιεικῆ φαῦλῳ εἶναι φίλον. καὶ γὰρ χρήσιμος ἂν εἴη πρὸς τὴν προαίρεσιν, ὁ μὲν φαῦλος πρὸς τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν τῷ σπουδαίῳ, ὃ δὲ τῷ μὲν ἀκρατεῖ πρὸς τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν, τῷ δὲ φαύλῳ πρὸς τὴν κατὰ φύσιν· καὶ βουλήσεται τὰ ἀγαθὰ, ἀπλῶς μὲν τὰ ἀπλῶς, τὰ δ' ἐκείνῳ ἐξ ὑποθέσεως. Another occurrence of ἐξ ὑποθέσεως is at *Eth. nic.* 1128b29–30.

(ἐπιθυμία) that opposes and overpowers the dictates of reason, for the incontinent is the person who wants the good yet fails to realize it. On the other hand, the κατὰ φύσιν προαίρεσις is the wrong choice the φαῦλοι make in conformity with their bad habit. Opposed to it is the ὑπάρχουσα προαίρεσις of the good, who in a sense benefit from the bad people, because bad people provide good ones the opportunity to exercise a virtue. In this case, good people pursue not only the absolute goods, but also the ἐξ ὑποθέσεως goods, which are good just conditionally, and in relation to the end good people set themselves, i.e. to help the bad. What Aristotle is thinking of here is the search for material and social goods, which is legitimate when it is ἐξ ὑποθέσεως, i.e. motivated by the aim to help other people, whose volition is weak or whose habit is corrupt. Particularly important is Aristotle's claim that the προαίρεσις of the good person, when it is useful to the bad, is ὑπάρχουσα, i.e. actual but not habitual. This does not mean that the good purpose to help other people is foreign to the good habit, but rather that the search for material and social goods has to do not with the habit of the good people, but with the ὑπόθεσις they assume when they deliberate about whether and how to help other people.

The use of ὑπόθεσις in the last *Eudemian Ethics* passage suggests two points. The first is that every single intermediate objective identified by deliberative reasoning is good ἐξ ὑποθέσεως, since it links the deliberating subjects to their ends. The fundamental distinction between what is good in itself and what is good for the sake of something else<sup>33</sup> can be placed within the structure of deliberation, which is based on the connection "if this, then that". When we pursue a certain good that we do not want in itself but in order to attain a greater good, from a logical point of view we attach the predicate "good" to it, but ἐξ ὑποθέσεως. As a rule, therefore, every deliberation comprises the formulation of the hypothesis (the ultimate end) and the identification of goods that are such by hypothesis (the intermediate objectives). To this we must add that any intermediate objective that is not the immediate antecedent of the ultimate end, is good "by hypothesis" in two senses. It is good for the sake of the ultimate end, and it is good as well for the sake of the intermediate objective that it makes immediately possible. (For example: a drug is good by hypothesis, i.e. for the sake of health; an ingredient of the drug is good for the sake of health but, prior to that, for the sake of the production of the drug.)

The second point worth noting is that, in most of the examples he gives, Aristotle apparently views deliberation as a kind of reasoning aiming at production, rather than praxis. If we deliberate, and decide, to perform some acts

33 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1218b16 ff., *Eth. nic.* 1096b13 ff.

and pursue some things, not for their own sake but because they are useful for something else and good only on our starting hypothesis (the ultimate end), the performing of those acts, as well as the achieving of those instrumental goods, is to be considered as a sort of production. This is because the end is something different and separate from them, as is recovery with respect to the drug. This point is not easy to grasp, since Aristotle seems to consider *praxis* superior to production exactly because it has its end in itself.<sup>34</sup> The solution of this difficulty lies in the idea of architectonic science and in the hierarchical order of activities and productions. I will deal with this issue later.

In *Eth. nic.* 1151a11–19 the comparison with mathematics presupposes a meaning of the mathematical notion of hypothesis, which is different from the one we have been considering until now:

Since the incontinent are apt to pursue, not on conviction (*μη διὰ τὸ πεπεισθαι*), bodily pleasures that are excessive and contrary to right reason, while the self-indulgent are convinced because they are the sort of people to pursue them, it is on the contrary the former that are easily persuaded to change their mind, while the latter are not. For virtue and vice respectively preserve and destroy the first principle, and in actions that for the sake of which is the first principle, as the hypotheses are in mathematics (*ἐν δὲ ταῖς πράξεσι τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ἀρχή, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς μαθηματικοῖς αἱ ὑποθέσεις*); neither in that case is it reason that teaches the first principles, nor is it so here—virtue either natural or produced by habituation is what teaches right opinion about the first principle.

When affirming that the *ἀκρατεῖς* pursue excessive pleasures and perform, therefore, vicious acts in contrast to the right reason *but not on conviction* Aristotle means that the *ἀκρατεῖς* do not possess an evil habit but a weak one. The words *μη διὰ τὸ πεπεισθαι* are to be understood with reference to the obedience to the authority of reason, which qualifies the desiring soul with respect to the calculative reason.<sup>35</sup> Mathematical hypotheses are the term of comparison of the “first principle”, that is, the end for the sake of which we deliberate. Clearly Aristotle implies, in this passage, that deliberation does not call into question the moral goodness of the end, but only considers its feasibility by examining the things that are conducive to it. This means that it is not possible to mod-

34 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1140a1–11; a16–18; 1140b4–7.

35 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1098a4–5. See also *Eth. nic.* 1102b26; 1119b12. A parallel locus to the *Nicomachean* passage cited, is *Eth. eud.* 1224b1–2.

ify and correct the moral nature of a certain end through the deliberation it originates, just as the mathematical reasoning that infers something from a principle is not the same as the one from which we learn the truth of that principle. The analogy here serves to explain that deliberative reasoning does not discuss the nature of the end, which represents its starting-point. Whether we set ourselves a good or a bad end depends on the opinion we formed about good and evil. Both the incontinent and the bad can be corrected, but it is easier to correct the former than the latter. Bad people assume a wicked end and judge everything by a wrong hypothesis. In the case of the incontinent, only some of their choices need to be corrected, i.e. those triggered by appetite.

Aristotle's use of the notion of hypothesis in these contexts is extremely important because it illuminates the role deliberation plays with respect to prescription. In Aristotle's theory of scientific demonstration, a hypothesis is a premise we assume as true in order to demonstrate something, but which is not itself demonstrated.<sup>36</sup> Hypotheses are involved in the construction of dialectical syllogisms, since they reflect received opinions;<sup>37</sup> furthermore, they play an important role in demonstration:

It is necessary that every demonstration and every deduction should prove either that something belongs or that it does not, and this either universally or in part, and further either probatively or hypothetically (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως).<sup>38</sup>

Indirect demonstration and *reductio ad absurdum* provide a way to prove the truth or the possibility of what has been assumed in the premises. This is particularly important for practical reasoning, and explains why Aristotle extended the use of hypotheses to the domain of deliberation. In syllogisms, both the quality and the modality of the premises are transmitted to the conclusion, and this is also the case of hypothetical syllogisms:

It is evident that if a false and not impossible hypothesis is made, the consequence of the hypothesis will also be false and not impossible: e.g. if A is false but not impossible, and if B follows from A, B also will be false but not impossible.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *An. pr.* 28a7; *An. post.* 76b23–28.

<sup>37</sup> *An. pr.* 24b10.

<sup>38</sup> *An. pr.* 40b23–24 (transl. by A.J. Jenkinson). cf. also 41a22–29.

<sup>39</sup> *An. pr.* 34a25–28.

On the other hand, when we draw from a hypothetical premise a conclusion that according to reason or experience is clearly false or impossible, the starting hypothesis must be false or impossible. On this principle rests *reductio ad absurdum*, which consists in assuming by hypothesis the proposition that contradicts the one whose truth we want to prove.<sup>40</sup> As is clear from this, in the practical domain any proposition assumed as a hypothesis requires an argument to prove its truth, or rather its possibility. In deliberative reasoning, we assume the end as a hypothesis because we have to find out all the conditions that, if satisfied, allow us to attain that particular end. Should this procedure lead to an ultimate term, or ἔσχατον, impossible for the agent, this impossibility would immediately affect the hypothesis, and the end would thus turn out to be unattainable. If we want to make a journey and at the end of our deliberative plan, we ascertain we do not have enough money, the hypothesis turns out to be impossible and the end is not achieved.

Aristotle also calls *hypothesis* a thesis corresponding to each of the two parts of a contradiction and representing the starting-point of a problematic inquiry; it is distinct from definition (ὁρισμός), which is a thesis too.<sup>41</sup> This shows that for Aristotle hypothetical reasoning has to answer a question of the type ‘is x or is it not?’, i.e. ‘is x or not?’ (cf. *An. post.* 72a20: τὸ εἶναι τι ἢ τὸ μὴ εἶναι τι<sup>42</sup>), whereas

40 *An. pr.* 41a26–28.

41 *An. post.* 72a15–21: “An immediately deductive principle I call a posit (θέσις) if one cannot prove it but it is not necessary for anyone who is to learn anything to grasp it; and one which it is necessary for anyone who is going to learn anything whatever to grasp, I call an axiom (ἀξίωμα) ... A posit which assumes either of the parts of a contradiction—i.e., I mean, that something is or something is not—I call a supposition (ὑπόθεσις); one without this, a definition (ὁρισμός)”. Transl. by J. Barnes.

42 Cf. also *Top.* 101b29–32: “For if it be put in this way: ‘Is two-footed terrestrial animal the definition of man?’ or ‘Is animal the genus of man?’ the result is a proposition; but if thus: ‘Is two-footed terrestrial animal the definition of man, or not?’ and: ‘Is animal the genus of man, or not?’ the result is a problem”. I think that this kind of question “... is or is not ...” is related to the question formulated at *Top.* 158a15–18: “Not every universal seems to be a dialectical proposition, e.g. ‘What is man?’ or ‘In how many ways is the good used?’ For a dialectical proposition must be of a form to which it is possible to reply ‘Yes’ or ‘No, whereas to the aforesaid it is not possible’”. Transl. by W.A. Pickard-Cambridge. This text, together with *Top.* 160a33–34; *Soph. el.* 175b9–10; b13–14; 176a10–11; a15–16, is taken into account by S. Bobzien, “Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 1113b7–8 and Free Choices”, in P. Destree-R. Salles-M. Zingano (eds.), *What is Up to Us? Studies on Agency and Responsibility in Ancient Philosophy*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2014, 59–74, in the context of the interpretation of the *Nicomachean* passage in question. Bobzien, however, concludes that the mentioned texts from *Topics* and *Sophistical confutations* are not very useful for the *Nicomachean* passage. Without following Bobzien in the details of her interpretation, I claim that there is a natural relationship between dialectical questioning and delibera-

definition reveals the essence of a thing without raising the question as to whether its object exists. A definition is formulated so that we can understand its meaning, while a hypothesis is formulated in order to solve a problem and allow us to choose one of the alternatives of the contradiction:

Terms are not hypotheses (for they are not said to be or not to be anything), but hypotheses are among the propositions, whereas one need only grasp the terms; and hypotheses are not that ... but rather propositions such that, if they are the case, then by their being the case the conclusion comes about.<sup>43</sup>

A hypothesis, therefore, is a problematic premise. It can be assumed as true (within a demonstration) or as the outcome of an agreement between different people (in a dialectical syllogism), always in order to verify it or its contradictory alternative. This is important if the hypothesis is a practical end: the end is assumed as a given option whose feasibility has to be established. When this fails to happen, the contradictory alternative to that option has been established. This also holds for the so-called intermediate ends, i.e. all the preliminary conditions that have to be satisfied to attain the end. In my view, this has a lot to do with the comparative character of deliberation: to assess the means to achieve an end amounts to weighing the different options and choosing the best. Every time we make a particular choice, we exclude the alternative of the problem.

In the *Metaphysics* a hypothesis is the principle which particular sciences use in order to assume the genus their own species fall under. The hypothetical method is a means to infer from the genus the properties that also belong to the objects of inquiry of the particular science:

---

tive process. The latter begins with a practical end ("this object is worthy to be pursued") that is posed as a *hypothesis*, one of the two alternatives of a *problema* whose complete structure would be "this object is worthy to be pursued, *rather than not*". In other words, it seems to me that deliberating people are conceived of, by Aristotle, as ideally asking themselves how to achieve something that appears as a good, *rather than not*, that is, rather than an evil or a neutral thing. Another matter of fact is Aristotle's use of dialectical methodology in *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. On this controversial issue, see G. Salmieri, "Aristotle's Non-'Dialectical' Methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Ancient Philosophy*", 29 (2009), 311–335, J. Karbowski, "Endoxa, Facts, and the Starting Points of the *Nicomachean Ethics*", in D. Henry-K.M. Nielsen, *Bridging the Gap*, cit., 113–129, and D. Devereux, "Scientific and Ethical Methods in Aristotle's *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*", *ibidem*, 130–147.

43 *An. post.* 76b35–39.

It does not belong to the geometer to inquire what is contrariety or completeness or being or unity or the same or the other, but only to presuppose these concepts (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως).<sup>44</sup>

All these sciences mark off some particular being [...] starting from the essence, some making it plain to the senses, others assuming it as a hypothesis; they then demonstrate more or less cogently (ἀποδεικνύουσιν ἢ ἀναγκαιότερον ἢ μαλακώτερον) the essential attributes of the genus with which they deal.<sup>45</sup>

The term *μαλακώτερον* must not be interpreted only as alluding to the weakness of argument. What Aristotle here is thinking of, is that not all fields of scientific inquiry admit necessary inferences. Aristotle claims in various texts that not in every kind of inquiry can we reason with the same *akribēia*, and that sometimes we reason in a rather summary way and reach plausible conclusions. Furthermore, deliberation cannot be about necessary things, but only about possible ones, which may exist in different ways at different times. The inherence of the properties of a practical object is certainly inferred with “less rigour” than that of the properties of a mathematical or natural object, owing to the variability and contingency of the domain of human action. This is why the hypothesis corresponding to an end originates a kind of reasoning that has to consider not only general normative principles and opinions about the good, but also the circumstances.

The general characteristics of hypothesis, if transferred to deliberation, tell us that those who deliberate are always faced with a contradiction, and that any object of desire or any end assumed before deliberating is one of the alternatives of a contradiction. Such is also every intermediate step within deliberation. For example, if we propose to preserve our health or to possess a house, and think about how to achieve our end, from a logical point of view we have formulated, as our starting hypothesis, the following proposition: “health is worth choosing (rather than not)”; “building a house is useful (rather than not)”. The alternative, even if it is not formulated, i.e. verbalized, by the deliberating subject, is inherently linked with this kind of reasoning, and turns out to be particularly significant if we consider the intermediate ends we set ourselves along the way for the sake of the ultimate end. Each of these ends is a hypothesis whose possibility we have to verify, but is also a particular option among the

44 *Metaph.* 1005a11–13.

45 *Metaph.* 1025b7–13.

many that emerge in the course of deliberation. Unlike the end, which is a part of the contradiction although not an option ἐξ ὑποθέσεως, but the object of an actual desire, the intermediate objective is desired only ἐξ ὑποθέσεως, i.e. as a means to something else. Consequently, every intermediate objective can even be replaced by another, should it be less effective than expected or appear not very noble, etc. The problematic character “x, or not” is important for understanding the logical form of deliberation with respect to both the assumption of the end and, more importantly, the various stages within deliberation.

#### 4 The Mathematical Model

In addition to using the word ὑπόθεσις to describe the end as the starting-point of deliberation, Aristotle refers to the method of geometrical analysis and compares the end to a διάγραμμα. Perhaps he considers the method of geometrical analysis as the most suited to illustrate how procedural reasoning works. Geometrical analysis reveals the conditions of existence of the object assumed by hypothesis, as well as the logical sequence that, if we move through it in a reverse direction to analysis, allows us to reconstruct the object assumed by hypothesis.

In *Cat.* 14b1, Aristotle argues that in demonstrative sciences the order of priority between the different components of demonstration is essential. For example, in geometry the elements, as far as order is concerned, are prior to figures (τὰ γὰρ στοιχεῖα πρότερα τῶν διαγραμμάτων τῇ τάξει). It is generally believed that the term διάγραμμα, here as in other passages, refers not only to a geometrical figure insofar as it is drawn, but also to a proposition or a demonstration about a geometrical figure. This is the meaning the term also has in *Metaph.* 998a25 and 1014a36. In the first of these two passages, Aristotle discusses the aporia related to the nature of principles (whether they are the constitutive elements of beings or the genera) and uses the term διαγράμματα to indicate the geometrical theorems whose constitutive parts are those ἀποδείξεις which are common to all more complex demonstrations.<sup>46</sup> In the second passage, Aristotle analyzes the meanings of *element* (στοιχεῖον) and uses διάγραμμα almost as a synonym of ἀπόδειξις, or rather as one of its species (i.e. the species of geometrical demonstration). He views the elements of a geometrical demonstration as prior to demonstration itself as far as order is concerned, i.e. the order in the

46 *Metaph.* 998a25–27.



construction of the figure.<sup>47</sup> It is a logical as well as a genetic priority, such as to provide information about the rules of geometry. This aspect is extremely significant from a practical point of view, since the process of the construction of a geometrical figure, which begins with the elements into which the figure has been divided through analysis, has as its counterpart, in the practical domain, the sequence of actions conducive to the attainment of the end. As a result, the logical priority obtaining in geometry between the various elements of the *διάγραμμα* corresponds, in the practical domain, to the logical and temporal priority of actions (we have to do *this* before *that*). This is why Aristotle compares deliberation to analysis at *Eth. nic.* 1112b23–24: the analysis of the *διάγραμμα* carried out by a mathematician provides information about its reconstruction, as well as about more general rules of mathematical composition. In the same way, in the practical domain deliberation allows us to set, within certain limits, some stable rules of conduct. These rules can later become a matter for prescription.

In *Metaph.* 1051a21–33, Aristotle gives the example of two *διαγράμματα*—the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles; the angle inscribed in a semicircle is always right—in order to show that the theorem assumed by hypothesis is demonstrated by actualizing the truths which are only potentially present in the hypothesis:

It is by actualization also that geometrical constructions are discovered; for it is by dividing the given figures that people discover them. If they had been already divided, these constructions would have been obvious; but as it is the divisions are present only potentially. Why are the angles of the triangle equal to two right angles? Because the angles about one point are equal to two right angles. If, then, the line parallel to the side had been already drawn, the theorem would have been evident to any one as soon as they saw the figure. Why is the angle in a semicircle in all cases a right angle? Because if three lines are equal ... the conclusion is evident at a glance to one who knows this premise. Obviously, therefore, the potentially existing constructions are discovered by being brought to actuality (the reason being that thinking is the actuality of thought); so that potentiality is discovered from actuality (and therefore it is by an act of production that people acquire the knowledge), though the single actuality is later in generation.

47 *Metaph.* 1014a35–b1.

A διάγραμμα is a geometrical formula explained through the construction of a figure other than the starting one. Assume we get the new figure by drawing a line parallel to one of the sides of the triangle. The aim of this construction is to actualize a mathematical truth, which is only potentially present in the triangle. For if we draw a line parallel to one of the sides of the triangle, we can show the existence of angles identical to the interior ones of the triangle, and so conclude that the latter are equal to two right angles.<sup>48</sup>

A few remarks are in order. Aristotle uses διάγραμμα to indicate a theorem. He does not use the term πρόβλημα (whose definition, as we have seen, is alluded to by the term ὑπόθεσις in *Eth. eud.* 1227a8–9; b29–30; *Eth. nic.* 1151a17). Furthermore, the argument of *Metaph.* 1051a21–33 has the form of the request for an explanation rather than of a procedure. That is to say, the argument requires the indication of a cause as an answer to the question διὰ τί, *why?* (“Why are the angles of the triangle ...?”), not a procedure as an answer to the question *how?* It is clear, however, that Aristotle is thinking of a kind of reasoning that aims to solve a problem. The solution of a problem is found through the analysis of the properties of the object the problem is concerned with. The two final sentences are also worth discussing. The sentence “it is by an act of production that people acquire the knowledge (ποιούντες γιγνώσκουσιν)”, means that in the same moment in which we conduct the analysis of an object, the reverse process of generation of the object arises. The last step of generation, or of production, is our very starting object, plus the knowledge of the causes of its existing. Finally, the remark that in the generation of a particular thing actuality is posterior to potentiality, provides a good counterpart to what Aristotle claims while describing deliberation, i.e. that when we deliberate, the end is the starting-point and the act to choose is the ἔσχατον, whereas in action the end is ἔσχατον.

The structure of deliberation seems therefore modelled on the hypothetical reasoning of mathematical sciences and on the geometrical analysis of διαγράμματα, which Aristotle takes from the cultural context of his age.<sup>49</sup> The

48 The sentence about the parallel line seems an allusion to what will be known as the Euclides’ fifth postulate and, more precisely, the employment of this postulate in the demonstration of the equivalence of the angles of a triangle and two right angles.

49 Cf. S. Menn, “Plato and the Method of Analysis”, *Phronesis*, 47 (2002), 193–233, esp. 208–212. According to Menn, *Eth. nic.* 112b15–27 presupposes the problematic analysis in the form that is described in Pappus’ mathematical account. Besides, Aristotle’s use of ἀνάλυσις and διάγραμμα shows Aristotle’s and the Academy’s familiarity with the practice of geometric analysis. Plato himself resorts to such a practice in the celebrate *Meno* passage (86e–87b).

mathematician Pappus, in a section from his mathematical *Συναγωγή*,<sup>50</sup> provides extremely interesting evidence. Quoting as his sources Euclid, Apollonius of Perga and Aristaeus the Old,<sup>51</sup> he gives us an account of various aspects of the procedures by analysis and synthesis,<sup>52</sup> the hypothetical method, as well as the difference between theoretical and problematic reasoning. The first notion he clarifies is *ἔφοδος*, or “way of access”, i.e. a method of demonstration divided into analysis and synthesis. Analysis assumes by hypothesis the existence of the object of inquiry. It proceeds by searching for what directly originated the object of inquiry; then for what directly originated what originated the object of inquiry; and so on, until this movement leads to a known element or a principle of which it is not necessary to search for an antecedent. This element is a principle. Synthesis is the reverse procedure. Starting from the last element grasped in analysis and going through the propositions that were previously the object of analysis, it comes to the object of inquiry assumed as an initial hypothesis. There are two kinds of analysis: theoretical, searching for truth, and problematic, which is *ποριστικὸν τοῦ προταθέντος*, i.e. “able to provide the object of the hypothesis”. Theoretical analysis aims to verify whether the hypothesis is true, on the basis of the truth of the last known element. Problematic analysis, on the other hand, assumes an object of inquiry as known and inquires into its possibility. To do so, it assumes by hypothesis the immediate consequences of the object of inquiry assumed as known, then the consequences of the previ-

50 Cf. F. Hultsch, *Pappi Alexandrini collectionis quae supersunt*, 3 vols., Weidmann, Berlin 1876–1878, vol. 2, 634–636 = A.R. Jones, *Book 7 of Pappus' Collection. Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, Springer, New York-Berlin 1986, 82–84.

51 On Pappus' sources see A.R. Jones, *Book 7*, cit., 15 ff.; J. Mansfeld, *Prolegomena Mathematica. From Apollonius of Perga to the Late Neoplatonists. With an Appendix on Pappus and the History of Platonism*, Brill, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1998, 3–22; S. Cuomo, “Collecting Authorities, Constructing Authority in Pappus of Alexandria's *Συναγωγή*”, in W. Kullmann-J. Althoff-M. Asper (eds.), *Gattungen wissenschaftlicher Literatur in der Antike*, Gunter Narr, Tübingen 1998, 219–238; F. Acerbi, “Pappus, Aristote et le *τόπος ἀναλωόμενος*”, *Revue des Etudes Grecques*, 124 (2011), 93–113. On Pappus' method of exposition of problems and solutions and his attention for problems of construction, see S. Cuomo, *Pappus of Alexandria and the Mathematics of Late Antiquity*, CUP, Cambridge-New York 2000, esp. 170–185.

52 Pappus' notion of analysis has been matter of debate; see A. Szabó, “Analysis und Synthesis. Pappus 11 p. 634 ff. Hultsch”, *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis*, 10–11 (1974–1975), 155–164, and J. Hintikka-U. Remes, *The Method of Analysis. Its Geometrical Origin and Its General Significance*, Reidel Publ. Dordrecht-Boston 1974, 7. S. Menn, *art. cit.*, 203–204, tries to provide a logical description of what Pappus calls “problematic analysis”. Of major interest are the conclusions Menn draws about the fact that problematic analysis is more ancient than theoretic analysis as well as more heuristically fruitful.

ous consequences, and so on, until it comes to a proposition which, if it turns out to be possible, demonstrates the possibility of the starting object of the problematic analysis.

Pappus' account bears testimony to a debate on a double kind of hypothetical reasoning, theoretical and problematic. The latter corresponds more strictly to what I have called above "procedural reasoning" (with respect to deliberation) since it aims to "provide" (πορίζειν), i.e. to find what has been assumed in the hypothesis. Is it possible that Pappus gives us evidence of a theory of hypothetical reasoning Aristotle already knew?<sup>53</sup> He quotes as his sources three mathematicians who became famous for applying geometrical calculations to astronomy and complex cases of measuring, and who lived between Aristotle's adulthood and early Hellenism. It is plausible, therefore, that Aristotle knew the procedures described by Pappus and regarded them as a model for deliberative reasoning. It is also worth remembering that the separation between θεωρημα and πρόβλημα, which underlies Pappus' account, and probably was present in his sources too, was seemingly introduced by Philip of Opus.<sup>54</sup> The formulation of the ποριστικόν genus also goes back to the milieu of the Academy, more precisely to Menaechmus.<sup>55</sup> At the end of the IV century there exists a rather widespread discussion, perhaps promoted by astrometric and architectural problems, about models of reasoning for producing genetic demonstrations, constructive in a broad sense. Within those contexts, reasoning has to be "effective" and "useful", and has to provide a rule of calculation and a procedure.<sup>56</sup> Aristotle evidently understood the enormous practical significance of this method and applied it to the study of human action.

53 See C. Natali, *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, cit., 82.

54 Phil. Opunt. ap. Procl. *In Prim. Eucl. Elem. Libr.* 77, 7–17 and 78, 8–20 Friedlein = fr. 20 Lasserre. Cf. the commentary in F. Lasserre (ed.), *De Léodamas de Thasos à Philippe d'Oponte. Témoignages et fragments. Edition, traduction et commentaire*, Bibliopolis, Naples 1987, 621–622.

55 Ibid. = fr. 5 Lasserre.

56 It is worthwhile to recall also Hippocrates of Chios' method for the quadrature of the lunules, described by Eudemos of Rhodes, in *Simpl. In Aristot. Phys. Comm.* 60 sg. = fr. 140 Wehrli. According to Eudemos' account, Hippocrates proposed the following procedure: formulation of the problem; assumption of a proposition A as a principle *useful* (χρήσιμον) for the solution of the problem; demonstration of proposition A through a more general proposition B; demonstration of B. See L. Zhmud, "Eudemos' History of Mathematics", in I. Bodnár-W.W. Fortenbaugh (eds.), *Eudemos of Rhodes*, Transaction Publ. New Brunswick-London 2002, 263–306, esp. 266 and 270.

## 5 The Remote End

I earlier used the term *remote* to describe the end. By so doing, I adopted the expression that some scholars<sup>57</sup> have used with the purpose of emphasizing the peculiar character of the end of volition (βούλησις). Although present in the literature, the idea of the remoteness of the end has not been treated in depth. This certainly depends on the fact that in the Aristotelian texts describing deliberation, volition, and choice, there are no terms that explicitly relate to the *distance* (physical or temporal, or of other kind) between the deliberator and the end for the sake of which deliberation is promoted. Nevertheless, this idea is highly relevant to both volition, as compared to other forms of desire, and deliberation, whose diachronic structure presupposes a series of stages to go through. It is therefore worthwhile to dwell a little on the notion of “remote end”.

We deliberate, with varying degrees of precision, a plan of action for the sake of an end, which is *away* from us, i.e. away from the state of those who feel the desire and begin to deliberate. The distance of the end of volition must be interpreted in two ways. The first is temporal. The end is remote insofar as it is an objective we think we will achieve at a certain point in the future. The plan we deliberate comprises a series of actions stretching across time, from

---

57 The idea of the remoteness of the end is made clear by G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, cit., 79, not in connection with Aristotle but in the context of her analysis of practical syllogism. The remoteness of the end is the mark of practical reasoning about an object, which is “at a distance from the immediate action”. See also W.F.R. Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory*, cit. 165–166; N.O. Dahl, *Practical Reason, Aristotle, and Weakness of the Will*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, 26: “The object of a desire resting on calculative imagination is typically distant in time”. This would allow Aristotle to explain the conflict of two opposite desires, 26 n. 3; S. Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, cit., 217 and “Philosophical Introduction”, in S. Broadie-C. Rowe (eds.), *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics*, OUP, Oxford 2002, 45 f.: Broadie proposes an interesting use of the sense of remoteness of the end (or ends) set up by normative cognition and ethical values, rather than actual motivations. Broadie puts in light the distinction between normative opinions and desires as drives to decision, so distinguishing deliberation, which is induced by personal interests or dictated by particular circumstances, from reflection about values and general practical problems. In my view, however, the “distance” is inherent to the object of volition, in that this can be achieved only after realizing a number of intermediates objectives. So, if we *want* something (even an individual end), this is not attainable without satisfying preliminary conditions and we have to deliberate. See also C.C.W. Taylor, *Pleasure, Mind, and Soul. Selected Papers in Ancient Philosophy*, OUP, Oxford 2008, 204, and P.L. Simpson, *The Eudemian Ethics of Aristotle. Translated with Explanatory Comments*, Transaction Publ., New Brunswick-London 2013, 390.

the moment deliberative reasoning has reached its end, its *πέρας* or *ἔσχατον*;<sup>58</sup> the time span necessary to achieve the desired end starts with the first action we plan to undertake. This means that the deliberating subject must be able to think and imagine this temporal extension.<sup>59</sup> The ability to imagine a future objective, a distant end, is specially significant for Aristotle, who views it as a prerogative of rational animals.<sup>60</sup> Rational animals deliberate about the means to a future end because they possess not only deliberative reason, but also a special imaginative capacity. Deliberative imagination is the ability of human beings to imagine the future and “visualize” what is not yet there but can exist as a result of their action.<sup>61</sup>

The remote character of the end can also be construed as logical, when the different actions deliberated for the sake of the end are connected to one another through a causal relationship. In this case the deliberating subject sees the end as an objective that can be attained if certain conditions are satisfied, i.e. its material or efficient causes (the former being the conditions in which the desired end is only potentially present). This way of understanding the remote character of the end is emphasized in the *Metaphysics* passage discussed above (1032a32–b21), where Aristotle describes the deliberative reasoning of the physician not from the point of view of the actual volition of an end, but from that of the knowledge of the form or essence of the end (the form “health”).

Clearly, these two ways of qualifying the distance of the end from the deliberator, whether temporal or logical, are not alternative: normally, any deliberation aiming to set up a series of actions causally connected to one another also sets up a temporal plan of action. However, there is a significant difference between the temporal and logical remoteness of the end. To consider the end as remote in time, i.e. as something that will or could happen in the future depending on the actions we choose to perform, amounts to making heavy use of imagination, particularly deliberative imagination, while deliberating. To consider the remote end in its logical sense means to attach more importance to the knowledge of the causes, i.e. to science, and less to imagination. The logical way, therefore, is the most suitable for setting practical rules that are comparatively stable and constant. Both the temporal and the logi-

58 The structure of a plan of action is clearly described in all passages about deliberation: *Eth. eud.* 1226b12–13; 1227a18–20; *Eth. nic.* 112b18–23; 1141b28; *De an.* 433a15–16; *Metaph.* 1032b5–20.

59 Cf. *De an.* 431b7–8.

60 Cf. *De an.* 433a23–25, and 434a6–7.

61 *De an.* 434a5–10. This text will be analyzed more in detail, see *infra*, p. 130.

cal perspective are essential to prescription. Calculative reason commands us to act in a certain way for the sake of the future, whereas appetite leads us to something immediate (see below, *De anima* 433b5 ff.). The logical perspective, however, plays a more important role in the development of norms and regulative principles for other people's conduct (e.g. in technical and artistic directions, pedagogical rules, and political laws). The reason for this lies in the fact that those who prescribe something, for instance a certain hygienic regimen, do not do so because they want to achieve a physical state; and those who legislate in a certain domain, do not want to achieve the particular object their legislative act is about; rather, they are prompted by the desire to restore other people's health or introduce order into their lives, by means of rules.

The remote character of the end is also closely connected with volition. We could even say that for Aristotle volition is precisely the kind of ὀρεξις that focuses on remote objects whose attainment requires a deliberate plan. In *De an.* 432b5 and *Top.* 126a13 Aristotle claims that βούλησις arises ἐν τῷ λογιστικῷ. In both passages the word λογιστικόν indicates a psychic faculty which is at the same time different from and closely linked with ὀρεκτικόν. In the broader context of *De an.* 432b5, Aristotle mentions various ways of distinguishing the faculties of the soul, including the dualism of rational and irrational soul (τὸ λόγον ἔχον καὶ τὸ ἄλογον), the tripartition of λογιστικόν, ἐπιθυμητικόν and θυμοειδές (432a25–26), as well as more complex views. Despite these partitions, however, some of these psychical functions seem at least in part connected with one another:

... further the imaginative, which is, in its being, different from all, while it is very hard to say with which of the others it is the same or not the same, supposing we determine to posit separate parts in the soul; and lastly the appetitive, which would seem to be distinct both in definition and in power from all hitherto enumerated. It is absurd to break up the last-mentioned faculty: for volition is found in the calculative part and desire and passion in the irrational; and if the soul is tripartite appetite will be found in all three parts.<sup>62</sup>

62 *De an.* 432a31–b7. Transl. by J.A. Smith. On the way in which various psychic functions are interwoven in *De an.* 111 9, see R. Polansky, *Aristotle's De anima*, CUP, Cambridge 2007, repr. 2008, 525; on the place taken by imagination in *De an.* 111 3–8, in relation to the other animal faculties, V. Caston, "Why Aristotle Needs Imagination", *Phronesis*, 41, 1996, 20–55, esp. 43–44; on the relationship between volition, thought and normative opinions, see G. Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire*, CUP, Cambridge 2012, 170–196.

In *Top.* 126a13 we find a similar connection between βούλησις and λογισμός (πάσα γὰρ βούλησις ἐν τῷ λογιστικῷ). In ch. 10 of the III book of *De anima*, however, Aristotle seems to be distinguishing in a rather clear-cut way practical intellect (νοῦς πρακτικός) from desire as two different causes of animal movement, and he claims that the main moving principle of animals is a single one, i.e. the desiring faculty.<sup>63</sup> If practical intellect moves animals, it does so through a particular kind of desire, i.e. volition, since

... volition is a form of desire and when movement is produced according to calculation it is also according to volition.<sup>64</sup>

The remarks taken from the *De anima* and the *Topics* confirm that action is always caused by a desire aiming at an end. The end is either perceived as present and actual,<sup>65</sup> or just imagined and not actually perceived, or conceived of as an object that can be achieved only after one or more conditions have been satisfied. In both the second and third cases, i.e. when the desired object is not perceived as present and actual, a plan of action is needed which in turn requires a calculation. Whether the end is imagined or thought, therefore, it is remote and to be achieved in the future. The difference between the remote end of βούλησις and the immediate end of ἐπιθυμία is extremely important for understanding the phenomenon of ἀκρασία, which consists in the simultaneous presence in the soul of conflicting βούλησις and ἐπιθυμία:

Since desires run counter to one another, which happens when a principle of reason and an appetite are contrary and is possible only in beings with a sense of time—for while thought bids us hold back because of what is future (ὁ μὲν γὰρ νοῦς διὰ τὸ μέλλον ἀνθέλκειν κελεύει), appetite is influenced by what is just at hand (ἡ δ' ἐπιθυμία διὰ τὸ ἥδη): a pleasant object which is just at hand presents itself as both pleasant and good, without

63 See *De an.* 433a15–21: “Desire is in every form of it relative to an end; for that which is the object of desire is the stimulant of practical thought; and that which is last in the process of thinking is the beginning of the action. It follows that there is justification for regarding these two as the sources of movement, i.e. desire and practical thought; for the object of desire starts a movement and as a result of that thought gives rise to movement, the object of desire being to it a source of stimulation ... That which moves therefore is a single faculty, i.e. the faculty of desire (ἐν δὲ τι τὸ κινεῖν, τὸ ὀρεκτικόν).”

64 *De an.* 433a23–25: ἡ γὰρ βούλησις ὄρεξις, ὅταν δὲ κατὰ τὸν λογισμὸν κινῆται καὶ κατὰ βούλησιν κινεῖται.

65 Cf. *De an.* 434b26–28; *De sensu*, 436b10–20; *De motu*, 701a29–30: ὅταν ἐνεργήσῃ γὰρ ἡ τῇ αἰσθήσει πρὸς τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ἢ τῇ φαντασίᾳ ἢ τῷ νῷ, οὐ ὀρέγεται, εὐθὺς ποιεῖ.



condition in either case, because of want of foresight into what is farther away in time—, it follows that while that which originates movement must be specifically one, viz. the faculty of desire as such—or rather farthest back of all the object of that faculty; for it is it that itself remaining unmoved originates the movement by being apprehended in thought or imagination—...<sup>66</sup>

In this passage Aristotle clarifies the following points: 1) the contrast between different kinds of desire depends on the presence of reason; 2) this contrast only occurs in beings that can perceive time; 3) reason commands us to resist appetitive desire with respect to the future because appetite only sees the present moment. These remarks confirm that volition is the desire for an end which is remote in time.

Other passages provide information on the logical way of understanding the remote end. The first is the already discussed passage *Eth. nic.* 1112b11–19. Here Aristotle gives us three examples of contexts for a remote end, i.e. recovery, persuasion and the law. To attain each of these ends, the deliberating subjects—physicians, rhetoricians, legislators—use their competence and opinions to set up a plan of action starting from their knowledge of the notion of the end. This means they have to be able to answer the questions *what is it?*, and *why?*, with respect to the end they set themselves. This operation of thought is closely linked with, and at the same time different from, the other, which consists in finding the means to the end, so as to be able to answer the question *how?* For example, a physician has to interpret the symptoms of a disease in order to set up a therapeutic plan. As is clear, the remote character of the end does not exclude that it has to be well-defined: the more deliberation is aimed at a particular action, the more well-defined the end has to be. A physician then does not pursue health in general, but the recovery of a certain patient, just as in a virtuous action we do not pursue the golden mean in general, but the golden mean that a certain series of actions requires under some specific circumstances.

The logical distance of the end is clear from the structure of deliberative reasoning and from the use of the terms *ἔσχατον* and *πρῶτον αἴτιον* in *Eth. nic.* 1112b23–24 and elsewhere. Aristotle frequently uses *ἔσχατον* in the *Analytics* to indicate the minor term in the premises of a syllogism.<sup>67</sup> There is one passage, however, where he gives the word a different, or rather opposed, meaning to

66 *De an.* 433b5–12.

67 Cf. *An. pr.* 25b33, 26a3, a6; 33b5 and b15; 48b2; 59b19, 69a21–23; *An. post.* 71a23. As is well known, Aristotle also uses *eschaton* in reference to the *schema*, i.e., the figure of the syllogism, but this use is not relevant here.

that of the minor extreme. In chapter 24 of the first book of the *Posterior Analytics*, he argues that universal demonstration is superior to particular demonstration for main two reasons. Universal demonstration demonstrates through the essence of a certain particular object of which a certain property is predicated.<sup>68</sup> In addition, universal demonstration demonstrates by showing why a determination belongs to a certain object.<sup>69</sup> In the second case, we possess the science of something when it is clear that the cause we have reached does not presuppose another cause or require further explanation: we have found that “the last term is in this way an end and a limit (τέλος γὰρ καὶ πέρας τὸ ἔσχατον ἢ δι’ οὕτως ἐστίν).”<sup>70</sup> At this point, Aristotle gives an example of a kind of reasoning that concerns human action but is not deliberative, because it aims to answer the question *why?*, in the sense of *with what aim?* This reasoning searches for a cause, not a practical procedure or a plan of action. This kind of reasoning highlights an upwards way to the first cause beyond which it is unnecessary to go:

With what aim did he come? So as to get the money—and that so as to give back what he owed; and that so as not to be dishonest. And going on in this way, when it is no longer because of something else or with some other aim, we say it is because of this as an end that he came (and that it is and it came about) and that then we best know why he came. Thus if the same goes for all explanations and reasons why, and in the case of explanations in terms of aim we know best in this way—in the other cases too, therefore, we then know best when this no longer belongs to it because it is something else.<sup>71</sup>

68 Cf. *An. post.* 85b5–7: “For if two right angles belong not as isosceles but as triangle, one who knows that the isosceles has two right angles will know it less well as such than one who knows that a triangle has two right angles”.

69 Cf. *An. post.* 85b23–27: “Again, if demonstration is a probative deduction of an explanation and the reason why, and the universal is more explanatory (for that to which something belongs in itself, is itself explanatory for itself; and the universal is primitive: therefore the universal is explanatory); hence the universal demonstration is better; for it is more a demonstration of the explanation and the reason why it is the case”.

70 85b29–30.

71 *An. post.* 85b30–38: οἷον τίνος ἕνεκα ἦλθεν; ὅπως λάβῃ τὰργύριον, τοῦτο δ’ ὅπως ἀποδῶ ὃ ὠφείλει, τοῦτο δ’ ὅπως μὴ ἀδικήσῃ· καὶ οὕτως ἰόντες, ὅταν μηκέτι δι’ ἄλλο μηδ’ ἄλλου ἕνεκα, διὰ τοῦτο ὡς τέλος φαιμέν ἐλθεῖν καὶ εἶναι καὶ γίνεσθαι, καὶ τότε εἰδέναι μάλιστα διὰ τί ἦλθεν. εἰ δὴ ὁμοίως ἔχει ἐπὶ πασῶν τῶν αἰτιῶν καὶ τῶν διὰ τί, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ὅσα αἴτια οὕτως ὡς οὐ ἕνεκα οὕτως ἴσμεν μάλιστα, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἄρα τότε μάλιστα ἴσμεν, ὅταν μηκέτι ὑπάρχῃ τοῦτο ὅτι ἄλλο.

The ἔσχατον here is the final step that the *search for the cause* of an action reaches by starting from the cause that is closest to the object of inquiry (to give back what he owed), and moving on until it comes to something which is not caused by anything else (presumably, to be honest). Here, the ἔσχατον is the *end* the man in the example started from in the course of his deliberation; being some sort of purpose he has set himself, this end has no prior cause. Although the expression πρῶτον αἴτιον does not occur in this passage, we can safely assume that, when at 85b32 Aristotle speaks about the aim of not being dishonest (ὅπως μὴ ἀδικήσῃ), he means the first cause, i.e., from the point of view of his theory of science, the most universal object of knowledge. It is important to note, however, that in this case the aim of not committing an injustice is a *first* cause not because it expresses the most universal notion among those relevant to the demonstration, but because it expresses the purpose of the person whose moral, or psychological, attitude we want to understand. Of course, it would hardly make sense to go beyond that purpose, if what we are trying to determine is personal responsibility. Consequently, the πρῶτον αἴτιον in the explanation of the attitude of a person is the (logically) most remote end with respect to the *explanandum* (among those we can consistently count among the causes of the *explanandum*), and not the most universal notion.

The πρῶτον αἴτιον and the ἔσχατον are the same thing, and they play a prominent role in scientific explanation. This role is different from the one Aristotle ascribes to the πρῶτον αἴτιον and ἔσχατον in deliberative reasoning, that is, at very moment the deliberative reasoning is elaborated, and it is not difficult to understand why. The example of a final cause in ch. 24 of the *Posterior Analytics* is a πρῶτον αἴτιον in a line of reasoning that starts from a performed action and goes back to its motives, i.e. the causes that triggered it. This upwards process is of great practical significance when it is necessary to inquire into the reasons for an action (in the case of a judge, or a psychologist, etc.), since in such cases we want to identify the final cause that gave rise to a particular choice. From the point of view of our inquiry into the causes, therefore, the ἔσχατον, which is the last step of *our* inquiry, not of the deliberator, is the first motive that originated the course of actions, and it corresponds to the πρῶτον αἴτιον in the meaning this expression has, for instance, in *Metaph.* 1070b27. By contrast, the deliberating subjects do not inquire, obviously, into the cause of their actions, but into the means they need. From the point of view of the search for the means, the position of ἔσχατον and πρῶτον αἴτιον is reversed, since the final step of the deliberative inquiry is the first of the actions that will lead to the remote end. As a result, in deliberation the πρῶτον αἴτιον is not the end but the means, more precisely the means which is closest to the particular and con-

tingent state of the deliberating subject (by contrast with what happens in the search for the causes, where the *πρῶτον αἷτιον* is the most remote term).

All of this suggests that deliberative reasoning can also take on a deductive form, i.e. that of non-apodeictic syllogism. The starting-point of deliberation can be not a personal end, but a general norm, whose application is a goal shared by many people (for instance, a law of the State or some moral rule generally agreed upon). From this general starting-point we will have to infer what particular actions are worth performing, each of them being a particular intermediate objective on the way to the ultimate end. The more this inference is based on the knowledge of material and efficient causes, the more effective will be the final choice (or prescription), as we shall see while discussing another important passage of the *Posterior Analytics*.

## 6 Desire, Deliberation and Prescription

Chapters 9–11 of the III book of *De anima* provide further information on the relationship between desire, deliberation and prescription. The discussion of some passages of these chapters is necessary if we are to understand the role desire and imagination play in deliberation and, more importantly, to establish whether it is possible to deliberate in the absence of desire. In other words, we have to determine whether it is possible that someone deliberates about how to attain a particular good even if the actual desire of that good is not present. Prescription meant as the regulation of other people's conduct is largely dependent on this possibility.

The basic problem that provides the starting-point for the inquiry in ch. 9 is the origin of animal movement. Animals are characterized by the functions of judgement and movement. Judgement is based on sensation and thought, or intellect,<sup>72</sup> as is made clear in chapters 2 and 3 of book III. We have now to find out the cause of the local movement of animals and of human action. This cause must reside in some psychic faculty. In order to find out what it is, we have to pin down the nature of local movement. Local movement always takes place for the sake of some end and is accompanied by imagination and desire. Desire plays a crucial role since, as Aristotle remarks, no being moves if it does

---

72 *De. an.* 432a15–20: “The soul of animal is characterized by two faculties, the faculty of discrimination (τὸ κριτικὸν), which is the work of thought and sense, and the faculty of originating local movement. Sense and thought we have now sufficiently examined. Let us next consider what it is in the soul which originates movement”.

not feel a desire or a repulsion, unless it is forced to.<sup>73</sup> In his theory on the origin of movement, Aristotle emphasizes the role of desire at the expense of imagination. Imagination's task is to evoke through memory the existence of perceived objects as well as of the pleasant or unpleasant emotions that accompanied their perception. This evocation of emotions moves animals only if they are in an actual emotional state (e.g. they desire something, are hungry, etc.).<sup>74</sup>

Aristotle claims more than once that animal movement is caused by actual desire, which in turn is produced by a pleasant emotion (just as repulsion or fear are produced by a painful emotion). He sometimes explains that imagination does not evoke painful and pleasant emotions in the same way as opinion or sensation. It does not do so in the same way as opinion since true opinion concerns a real object and therefore gives us information about the real existence of a pleasant or painful thing, whereas imagination can be accompanied by the awareness that what we are imagining is not real.<sup>75</sup> In addition, imagination is different from sensation, for sensation is either potential or actual and only in the second case is it accompanied by pleasure or pain.<sup>76</sup> Desire too can be potential or actual and only in the latter case is it able to move animals.<sup>77</sup>

The concept of actual desire is clearer in the *De motu animalium* and the *Ethics*. In *De motu* 701a31–32, Aristotle explains that animal movement originates when, instead of an act of judgement, an actual ὄρεξις comes about.<sup>78</sup> The concept of actual desire also plays a prominent role in the account of ἀκρασία, as is clear from *Eth. eud.* 1223a37–b2, and most notably from *Eth. nic.* 1147a31–b3:

73 *De an.* 432b15–17.

74 Cf. *De an.* 429a30–31.

75 See *De an.* 427b14–25: “For imagination is different from either perceiving or discursive thinking, though it is not found without sensation, or judgement without it. That this activity is not the same kind of thinking as judgement is obvious. For imagining lies within our own power whenever we wish ... but in forming opinions, we are not free: we cannot escape the alternative of falsehood or truth. Further, when we think something to be fearful or threatening, emotion is immediately produced, and so too what is encouraging; but when we merely imagine we remain as unaffected as persons who are looking at a painting of some dreadful or encouraging scene”. See V. Caston, “Why Aristotle Needs Imagination”, cit., 22–25.

76 428a6–10.

77 431a10–14: “To feel pleasure or pain is to act (τὸ ἐνεργεῖν) with the sensitive mean towards what is good or bad as such. Both avoidance and desire when actual (κατ’ ἐνέργειαν) are identical with this: the faculty of desire and avoidance are not different, either from one another or from the faculty of sense-perception; but their being is different”.

78 “For when a man is *actually using* (ἐνεργήσῃ) perception or imagination or thought in relation to that for the sake of which, what he desires he does at once. For the actualizing of desire is a substitute for inquiry or thinking”.

... the universal opinion is present in us restraining us from tasting, and there is also the opinion that everything sweet is pleasant, and that this is sweet (now this is the opinion that is active, αὕτη δὲ ἐνεργεῖ), and when appetite happens to be present in us, the one opinion bids us avoid the object, but appetite leads us towards it (for it can move each of our bodily parts); so that it turns out that people behave incontinently under the influence (in a sense) of reason and opinion, and of opinion not contrary in itself, but only incidentally—for the appetite is contrary not the opinion—to right reason.

In both passages, Aristotle claims that the incontinent have a true opinion of the good and a desire for the good (βούλησις) which remains inactive as compared to an actual ἐπιθυμία. Human action too, then, only starts if there is an actual desire. The desire that moves human beings can be an ἐπιθυμία as well as a βούλησις.<sup>79</sup> The presence of an actual βούλησις brings about a deliberation since it is the desire for a remote good. As Aristotle makes clear, thought alone does not originate human action. This means that an opinion about a good is not by itself the cause of action:

Neither can the calculative faculty or what is called thought be the cause of such movement; for mind as speculative never thinks what is practicable, it never says anything about an object to be avoided or pursued, while this movement is always in something which is avoiding or pursuing an object. Not even when it is aware of such an object does it thereby enjoin pursuit or avoidance of it; e. g. the mind often thinks of something terrifying or pleasant without enjoining the emotion of fear ... even when thought *does prescribe and bids* us pursue or avoid something, sometimes no movement is produced; we act in accordance with appetite, as in the case of moral weakness ... Lastly, desire too is incompetent to account fully for movement; for those who successfully resist temptation have desire and appetite and yet follow thought and refuse to enact that for which they have desire.<sup>80</sup>

79 Cf. J. Moss, "Akrasia and Perceptual Illusion", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 91 (2009), 119–156: Moss offers an analysis of the notion of *akrasia* described in *De an.* III 10, as a conflict between rational desire and imagination and comes to the conclusion that *akrasia* is comparable to cases of perceptual error.

80 *De an.* 432b26–433a8: ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ τὸ λογιστικὸν καὶ ὁ καλούμενος νοῦς ἐστίν ὁ κινῶν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ θεωρητικὸς οὐθὲν θεωρεῖ πρακτόν, οὐδὲ λέγει περὶ φευκτοῦ καὶ διωκτοῦ οὐθὲν, αἰεὶ δὲ ἡ κίνησις ἢ φεύγοντός τι ἢ διώκοντός τί ἐστιν. ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὅταν θεωρῇ τι τοιοῦτον, ἤδη κελεύει φεύγειν ἢ

The final sentence of this passage—particularly the words “(they) follow thought (ἀκολουθοῦσι τῷ νῷ)” —, should not be taken, I suppose, as meaning that thought can sometimes be the cause of human action, but rather as follows: when human beings are moved by βούλησις, they can remain consistent with both the object of volition and the deliberate plan of action, even in presence of an actual, but passing, ἐπιθυμία (for instance, they persevere in work, or refrain from eating, despite the attraction towards entertainment, or food). We know that βούλησις is the kind of desire proper to human beings, since it is the desire for a remote end. The remote end reflects an opinion about the good or apparent good; in addition, it needs us to reason about the means to achieve it. The case of continent people feeling an ἐπιθυμία but following the dictates of νοῦς (ἀκολουθοῦσι τῷ νῷ) reveals that ἐγκράτεια is a virtue thanks to which the volition of the good end *remains active*, even when an incidental or passing appetite arises which is in conflict with volition. In lines 433a6 and a8 the term ὄρεξις is used in a generic way to indicate only the species of ἐπιθυμία, as is clear from the occurrence of the participles ὀρεγόμενοι καὶ ἐπιθυμοῦντες in line a7. It is not thought, or opinion, and desire that compete to move human beings, but two species of desire. This also emerges from the following passage of the *De anima*, where the calculating nature of practical intellect, as well as its relationship with desire, is emphasized:

Both of these then are capable of originating local movement, thought and desire: thought, that is, which calculates means to an end, i.e. practical thought ... while desire is in every form of it relative to an end; for that which is the object of desire is the stimulant of practical thought ... It follows that there is a justification for regarding these two as the sources of movement, i.e. desire and practical thought; for the object of desire starts a movement and as a result of that thought gives rise to movement, the object of desire being to it a source of stimulation ... That which moves therefore is a single faculty and the faculty of desire ... thought is never found producing movement without desire.<sup>81</sup>

In this passage Aristotle is undoubtedly claiming that the main cause of action is desire. When he says that thought too plays a causal role in human action

---

διώκειν, οἷον πολλάκις διανοεῖται φοβερόν τι ἢ ἡδύ, οὐ κελεύει δὲ φοβεῖσθαι ... ἔτι καὶ ἐπιτάττοντος τοῦ νοῦ καὶ λεγούσης τῆς διανοίας φεύγειν τι ἢ διώκειν οὐ κινεῖται, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν πράττει, οἷον ὁ ἀκρατής ... ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ' ἡ ὄρεξις αὐτῆς κυρία τῆς κινήσεως· οἱ γὰρ ἐγκρατεῖς ὀρεγόμενοι καὶ ἐπιθυμοῦντες οὐ πράττουσιν ὧν ἔχουσι τὴν ὄρεξιν, ἀλλ' ἀκολουθοῦσι τῷ νῷ.

81 *De an.* 433a13–25.

he alludes to the remote end, for which practical thought must indicate what actions we need to perform to achieve it, thereby deliberating a plan.

The passage *De an.* 432b26–433a8 is significant for other reasons too. Aristotle establishes a close link between the principle of action and the ability to prescribe a choice or an avoidance. That theoretical, or scientific, intellect does not move animals depends on the fact that it does not think about choices and avoidances, but about eternal or natural objects. Yet even when intellect considers (θεωρῆ) actions, it does not command us to choose or avoid. This remark is of the utmost importance and deserves a brief discussion. The intellect Aristotle is speaking about is the same theoretical intellect he has just mentioned, which can consider, *theorein*, practical and moral objects in order to define their nature rather than prescribe their choice. Intellect is theoretical when it observes and describes reality without aiming at anything. The kind of reasoning which has an aim is that of practical intellect. Aristotle, however, adds that not even practical intellect, i.e. the one that prescribes, is sufficient to originate action. The case of the incontinent shows that even in the presence of an object of volition, i.e. a remote good, we can be moved by the appetite for an object that is different from that of volition, and opposed to it. On the other hand, the case of the self-controlled, the ἐγκρατής, shows that the appetite for an object opposed to that of volition is not by itself sufficient to cause action. Consequently, when he claims that “even when thought does prescribe and bids us pursue or avoid something, sometimes no movement is produced; we act in accordance with desire, as in the case of moral weakness”, Aristotle means that practical intellect prescribes a certain conduct for the sake of a remote end, which is expressed in the form of a judgement or an opinion (*this good is worth pursuing*) we assent to. The content of this judgement, however, may not become the object of an actual volition because of an actual appetite. This is the case when we know that a certain end is worth pursuing but turn away from it because of our desire for something less worth pursuing but more directly accessible. In such circumstances, the particular kind of desire we call volition is not actual.

The case of ἀκρασία accounts for the following points. First, there are people who persist in assenting to a normative opinion that aims at a certain remote good. Second, these people are able to deliberate about the means to achieve that remote good: otherwise, it would not be possible for their practical intellect to prescribe pursuing or avoiding something, for pursuing and avoiding are choices of certain actions by which we expect to attain an end; and choice is the outcome of deliberation. Finally, their volition of the remote good is not actual. Two consequences follow from this. The first, which is explicit in Aristotle’s text, is that the prescriptive act of practical intellect is not sufficient to



cause action. The second, which is implicit but in my view equally clear, is that the presence of an actual desire is not always necessary for the prescriptive activity of practical intellect. This means that the presence of an actual desire is not always necessary for deliberation either, which is the kind of reasoning that practical intellect uses for formulating a prescription. (It is appropriate to make it clear that the case of incontinence aims to account for the fact that we can deliberate well without an actual volition, but it does not entail at all that volition of good is not actual *only* because of an actual appetite that runs counter to it.)

Why would Aristotle discuss deliberation in the absence of an actual desire? From the quoted passage it is clear that he does not conceive of intellect as always considering the nature of the good and the beautiful with a view to immediately achieving them. However, it is plausible to think that he viewed this kind of reflection as able to provide norms and directions. In addition, it can be argued that for Aristotle the reflection on the goods and their prescription can take place in the absence of an actual desire for particular goods or personal ends. Nonetheless, this reflection is itself a deliberation in a broad sense, originated by the desire for a good which is higher than those we want to attain every time we deliberate. The desire I am alluding to is the aspiration to realize a common good and more general moral ends, from which many people can benefit. Aristotle discusses this topic in his political works, not his psychological treatment of the causes of animal movement. I shall return to this later.

## 7 Deliberative Imagination and Recollection

Chapter 10 of the III book of the *De anima* is important, among other things, because it deals with imagination, one of the cognitive faculties that originate movement in animals and action in human beings. Imagination plays an “associative” role, since it can combine different images and connect them with one another in both a temporal and a comparative way: when we evoke the past, we can imagine a future experience; when we evoke different experiences, we can compare their respective desirability or worth.<sup>82</sup> Practical intellect uses

---

82 See D. Frede, “The Cognitive Role of *Phantasia* in Aristotle”, in M.C. Nussbaum-A. Oksenberg Rorty (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle's De anima*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1992, 279–295, esp. 282–287, on *phantasia* as “synthesizer”, by which Frede means a critical potentiality of imagination. This potentiality consists in providing the sentient with a panoramic of the perceptual context, or a “field of vision” (although she admits that such notions do

this associative ability. The choice of a certain conduct can be the outcome of a comparison of images allowing us to make a forecast about the future. This comparison is a critical operation from which deliberation benefits greatly: just like perception, imagination provides us with a description of a state of affairs. Before we continue our analysis of the concept of deliberative imagination, which is mentioned at the end of ch. 10 of book III of the *De anima* and taken up again in ch. 11, we have to discuss some points Aristotle makes in ch. 7 of the same book. In this chapter there occur some elements that highlight the two following issues: the importance of the feeling of pleasure and pain in animal movement and human action (for animals move for the sake of an end which they conceive of as good, *φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν*, and pleasure is conceived of as good); and the possibility that the soul, by means of the images, reflects on future events and thus deliberates.

Shortly after the beginning of the chapter, Aristotle claims that *feeling* is akin to *speaking* and *thinking*. Just as we *speak* and *think* about certain determinations with respect to a subject, i.e. as we affirm or deny, so we *feel* pleasant or painful things. Feeling pleasure and pain is the activity of a single sensible faculty. There do not exist two distinct attitudes of pleasure and pain: it is the same sensible faculty that likes or dislikes something, just as the same dianoetic faculty affirms or denies something. As the sensible soul avoids or pursues, so the dianoetic soul uses the predicates “good”, “bad”, “pleasant”, “painful” to refer to perceived or imagined things, and formulates affirmative and negative judgments.

Moreover, the dianoetic soul uses *φαντάσματα* and only thinks through them. Thanks to *φαντάσματα* and acts of thought, the soul “calculates”:

Sometimes by means of the images or thoughts which are within the soul, just as if it were seeing, it calculates and deliberates what is to come by reference to what is present; and when it makes a pronouncement, as in

---

not appear in Aristotle's text). On the notion of imagination considered as a flexible attitude, in that it makes animals, but especially humans, to go beyond the limit of what is presently being perceived, see also R. Polansky, *Aristotle's De anima, cit.*, 433: “Perceptions set up *phantasiai* enabling the animal to project beyond what is present to it. Humans can think of anything they wish and desire whatever might be possible. *Phantasia* originating in sense perception liberates from immediacy, opening up wider life possibilities”. Nevertheless, we cannot give *phantasia*, according to Polansky, a critical role in human cognition: “*Phantasia* may contribute to interpretation, but *phantasia* itself is presentational or representational rather than discriminating or evaluative ... the only passage in the corpus that seems to make *phantasia* a critical faculty is *De motu animalium* 700b17–22”.

the case of sensation, it pronounces the object to be pleasant or painful, in this case it avoids or pursues; and so generally in cases of action.<sup>83</sup>

The use of the verbs λογίζεται and βουλεύεται undoubtedly alludes to deliberation. What Aristotle is claiming, however, is not that the soul deliberates about *whether* a certain thing is pleasant or good and thus worth assuming as an end. Rather, he means that the soul “calculates and deliberates what is to come by reference to what is present”, i.e. it reflects on the things to do for the sake of an end it has already judged to be good. The φαντασία taking part in this operation supports reason in distinguishing between what is true and false, useful and harmful, etc.

It is to be noticed that, if τὸ μέλλον is the object of λογίζεται καὶ βουλεύεται, it cannot be the same as the end, τέλος. Imagination, in the sense Aristotle understands it here, allows us to *almost visualize* (ὥσπερ ὁρῶν) future events that arise from this or that practical choice. Τὰ μέλλοντα are not the desired ends that originate actions. Rather, they are either the actions that we will perform once we have made our choice, or the situations and states of affairs that we suppose will arise from those actions. Being μέλλοντα, i.e. future, these situations and states of affairs are just imagined objects and become elements of deliberative reasoning. They are *phantasmata* we build through our experience and the memory of past situations, which provide us with a basis for making comparisons. After setting itself an end, the soul deliberates about the various practical ways to attain it and imagines what the different outcomes, consequences and side effects of each of these ways can be. If this interpretation is correct, we have to conclude that τὰ παρόντα, i.e. the present things by reference to which we deliberate about future situations, are to be construed as the circumstances in which deliberating subjects are when they begin to deliberate about the way to achieve an end.<sup>84</sup> The end of ch. 10 reads: “inasmuch as an animal is capable of desire, it is capable of self-movement; it is not capable of desire without possessing imagination: and all imagination is either calculative or sensitive (ὀρεκτικὸν δὲ οὐκ ἄνευ φαντασίας· φαντασία δὲ πᾶσα ἢ λογιστικὴ ἢ αἰσθητικὴ)”.<sup>85</sup> Here Aristotle clearly uses the adjective λογιστικὴ not in the sense of “rational”

83 *De an.* 431b6–10: ὅτε δὲ τοῖς ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ φαντάσμασιν ἢ νοήμασιν, ὥσπερ ὁρῶν, λογίζεται καὶ βουλεύεται τὰ μέλλοντα πρὸς τὰ παρόντα· καὶ ὅταν εἴπῃ ὡς ἐκεῖ τὸ ἡδὺ ἢ λυπηρὸν, ἐνταῦθα φεύγει ἢ διώκει, καὶ ὅλως ἐν πράξει.

84 On τὰ παρόντα as “the present circumstances”, cf. Thuc. I 95, 7; II 88, 1; V 40, 3; Isocr. *In Callim.* 49, 4; *Ad Demon.* 29, 1; Plat. *Phaed.* 67c.

85 *De an.* 433b27–29.

but of “calculating”, i.e. deliberative, since the notion of “deliberative imagination” is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 11 starts with the issue of the existence of imagination in imperfect animals, i.e. those who lack some sensations. These animals feel pleasure and pain, without which there would be no movement at all. Consequently, they must possess imagination too, albeit of an indefinite kind, which entails that their movements are also indefinite. (By this Aristotle probably means that not all animals move with a clear representation of their end, which is the distinctive character of animal movement. Some of them, since they lack such sensations as sight or smell, perform an automatic movement, so to speak, dictated by the most elementary sensations.) Aristotle then moves on to discuss the difference between the imagination of animals and that of human beings:

Sensitive imagination, as we have said, is found in all animals, deliberative imagination only in those that are calculative: for whether this or that shall be enacted is *already* a task requiring calculation; and there must be a single standard to measure by, for that is pursued which is greater. It follows that what acts in this way must be able to make a unity out of several images. This is the reason why imagination is held not to involve opinion, in that it does not involve opinion based on inference, though opinion involves imagination. Hence, desire contains no deliberative element. Sometimes it overpowers wish and sets it in movement; at times wish acts thus upon desire ... desire overcoming desire, i.e. in the condition of moral weakness ... Thus three modes of movements are possible.<sup>86</sup>

Aristotle describes deliberative φαντασία as an aspect of the calculating part of the soul.<sup>87</sup> In his description of the character qualifying deliberative, or calcu-

86 *De an.* 434a5–15: ἡ μὲν οὖν αἰσθητικὴ φαντασία, ὥσπερ εἴρηται, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ζώοις ὑπάρχει, ἡ δὲ βουλευτικὴ ἐν τοῖς λογιστικοῖς (πότερον γὰρ πράξει τόδε ἢ τόδε, λογισμοῦ ἤδη ἐστὶν ἔργον· καὶ ἀνάγκη ἐνὶ μετρεῖν· τὸ μείζον γὰρ διώκει· ὥστε δύναται ἐν ἐκ πλειόνων φαντασμάτων ποιεῖν). καὶ αἴτιον τοῦτο τοῦ δόξαν μὴ δοκεῖν ἔχειν, ὅτι τὴν ἐκ συλλογισμοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, αὕτη δὲ κινεῖ· διὸ τὸ βουλευτικὸν οὐκ ἔχει ἢ ὀρεξίς· νικᾷ δ' ἐνίοτε καὶ κινεῖ ὅτε μὲν αὕτη ἐκείνην, ὅτε δ' ἐκείνη ταύτην ... ἢ ὀρεξίς τὴν ὀρεξίν, ὅταν ἀκρασία γένηται ... ὥστε τρεῖς φορές ἤδη κινεῖσθαι.

87 On the active character of deliberative imagination, in face of the passive nature of perceptual imagination, see R.J. Hankinson, “Perception and Evaluation. Aristotle on the Moral Imagination”, *Dialogue. Canadian Philosophical Review*, 29 (1990), 41–63; A. Ferrarin, “Aristotle on φαντασία”, in J.J. Cleary-G.M. Gurtler (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 21, Brill, Leiden 2006, 89–123, esp. 107 f., and J. Yuridin,

lative,<sup>88</sup> imagination—*πότερον γὰρ πράξει τόδε ἢ τόδε, λογισμοῦ ἤδη ἐστὶν ἔργον· καὶ ἀνάγκη ἐνὶ μετρεῖν· τὸ μείζον γὰρ διώκει· ὥστε δύναται ἐν ἑκ πλειόνων φαντασμάτων ποιεῖν*—we find at least an element which is already found in the logical structure of deliberative reasoning: deliberative imagination seems to proceed according to a problematic form. By introducing an alternative, the term *πότερον* alludes to the fact that deliberative imagination has as its content at least two practical options and thus gives rise to a *πρόβλημα*, i.e. the question by which we assess an alternative in order to choose an option in both the theoretical and the practical domain:

A dialectical problem is a subject of inquiry that contributes either to choice and avoidance, or to truth and knowledge, and does that either by itself, or as a help to the solution of some other such problem. It must, moreover, be something on which either people hold no opinion either way; or most people hold the contrary opinion to the wise ... for some problems it is useful to know only with a view to choice or avoidance ...<sup>89</sup>

The problematic inquiry helps us make a plausible choice, in accord with opinion and suited to the circumstances. The choice of one of the two options making up a *πρόβλημα* is determined by various reasons, but mostly by circumstances (“I choose this option rather than that, not because it is absolutely preferable, but because it is so with respect to the present circumstances”). The adverb *ἤδη*, at *De an.* 434a8, is significant too, if we consider the psychological context of this account of deliberative imagination: it indicates that we have got to a level of animal life that admits of the ability to make comparisons.

What enables the soul to make comparisons between practical options is the fact that *φαντασία* retains the image of a perceived object when it is not actu-

---

“Aristotelian Imagination and the Explanation of Behavior”, in G. Van Riel-P. Destrée (eds. with the assistance of C.K. Crawford-L. Van Campe), *Ancient Perspectives on Aristotle’s De Anima*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2009, 71–87. On deliberative *vel* calculative imagination of *De an.* 434a5–15 and its relation to practical syllogism, see R. Polansky, *Aristotle’s De anima*, cit., 529–533, and J. Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good*, cit., 140 f.: the calculative imagination is necessary for decision and has an evaluative character, because of the persistence of painful and pleasant perceptions.

88 D. Achtenberg, *Cognition of Value in Aristotle’s Ethics*, State University of New York Press, New York 2002, 28–30, distinguishes calculative and deliberative imagination, but actually such a distinction does not seem justified in the light of Aristotle’s texts: *λογιστική φαντασία* is mentioned at *De an.* 433b29, *βουλευτική* at 434a6, and, in both cases, it seems the unique alternative to *αἰσθητική φαντασία*.

89 *Top.* 104b1–7.

ally perceived any more, and retains it *for a long time*.<sup>90</sup> As a result, by means of the imagination the soul retains diverse φαντάσματα of a single object coming from perceptions that took place in different moments and contexts, in different psychic and physical states. In addition, a φάντασμα includes the memory of a pleasant or a painful emotion. For example, our soul can evoke the pleasure produced by food we ate when healthy, and the loathing we experienced when eating the same food while ill. It is then possible that the soul retains two φαντάσματα of the perception of the same object with respect to two different points in time or two different environmental or subjective conditions (i.e. health and illness, youth and old age, etc.). We may also recall that in *De an.* 433b5 ff., Aristotle claims that practical intellect commands us with a view to the future, whereas appetite is limited to the moment of perception. Therefore, if the ability to imagine the future is proper to human beings, who can deliberate just thanks to it, the comparison between different φαντάσματα of the same object is made with a view to a future good.

The comparison between different φαντάσματα allows deliberative imagination to produce a uniform standard of judgement, as is clear from the expression τὸ μείζον γὰρ διώκει in *De an.* 434a9. The comparative τὸ μείζον indicates an end only animals able to make comparisons and choices can pursue. Irrational animals have sensible imagination but no opinion, δόξα, since they do not possess a comparative imagination capable of producing a normative conclusion. (As a matter of fact, some irrational animals do have a very limited ability to compare sensations and images, but not for the sake of a remote end whose attainment requires reasoning; nor is it plausible that such comparisons between images are retained in the memory of irrational animals so as to enable them to formulate a “rule” of conduct.) In my view, the sentence ... ὅτι τὴν ἐκ συλλογισμοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, αὕτη δὲ κινεῖ in 434a11 means that, in addition to the sensible imagination that moves the irrational soul, also deliberative imagination (which τὴν refers to) can move animals (only the calculating and reasoning ones, of course). Δόξα is therefore a normative proposition, i.e. a judgement that always implies the comparative predicate μείζον, thereby indicating the object to pursue: the object is “bigger” from the point of view of a uniform standard of judgement (the ἐνὶ μετρεῖν at 434a8–9<sup>91</sup>), and so it is “more pleasant”, “nobler”, “more useful” etc. The sensible imagination of irrational animals, but also that

90 Cf. *De mem.* 449b23–27; 450a27–32; 451a2–8.

91 On the technical meaning of ἐνὶ μετρεῖν, see E. Cattanei, “L’immaginario geometrico”, cit. According to J. Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good*, cit., 146, the result of the operation of synthesis carried by the calculative imagination is a *phantasma*, not a plan of action.

of human beings when they are not deliberating, produces an impulse to move that can be translated into linguistic terms as follows: “this, here and now, is pursuable” (that is to say, with no term of comparison). Deliberative imagination is a comparative process, which would not be possible without practical intellect. The resulting opinion concerns a particular line of conduct that practical intellect considers necessary for the realization of a desire. This opinion says that it is better to do *x* than *y*, in order to get a certain end. Since irrational animals possess neither opinion nor deliberative imagination, the kind of desire in question must be βούλησις.

The sentence διὸ τὸ βουλευτικὸν οὐκ ἔχει ἢ ὄρεξις at 434a11–12 confirms that, from the point of view of the structure of the soul, the deliberative and the desiring faculties (the latter including volition) are distinct by nature, and ὄρεξις of any kind is not a calculation, but the tendency of the soul towards an end. Consequently, three situations can cause a conflict in human soul, those described in 434a12–15. The first situation is that in which βούλησις persists and prevails over a momentary ἐπιθυμία; it guides therefore the action of those who do not let themselves be distracted by objects other than that of βούλησις (for instance: I want to slim down, so I do not indulge my passion for sweets). The second situation is that in which an ἐπιθυμία toward a pleasant object, which is immediately available, prevails and takes the place of any βούλησις whose object is remote and opposed to that of appetite. The difference between this situation and that of ἀκρασία, which is mentioned shortly after, is that human beings who act in this way are like irrational animals not only because they are moved by ἐπιθυμία, but also because they have not formulated any βούλησις. Unlike irrational animals, however, human beings have the ability (as well as, in a sense, the “duty”) to feel a desire for higher and more valuable objects, which are remote and therefore need deliberation. Finally, the inferior kind of desire prevails over the superior, as in the case of incontinence. As the reference to ἀκρασία confirms, Aristotle is now claiming that an ἐπιθυμία prevails over the βούλησις that someone was able to formulate (unlike the preceding case, where ἐπιθυμία prevails *in the absence* of βούλησις), but not to retain, because of the weakness of their character.

Chapter 11 ends with an important clarification. When human actions aim at a remote end, desire needs a kind of reasoning that may well be a syllogism:

The faculty of knowing is never moved but remains at rest. Since the one premiss or judgement is universal and the other deals with the particular (for the first tells us that such and such a kind of person should do such and such a kind of act, and the second that this is an act of the kind meant, and I am a person of the type intended), it is the latter opinion that really

originates movement, not the universal; or rather it is both, but the one does so while it remains in a state more like rest, while the other partakes in movement.<sup>92</sup>

Aristotle's argument is constituted by a universal and normative proposition, which claims that (every) person of a certain quality must (always) perform an action of a certain quality; and by a particular proposition, which describes a certain state of affairs (e.g. I am a person of that quality and this is an action of that quality). For Aristotle the deliberating subject is moved by the particular proposition—despite the fact that the particular proposition is a descriptive judgement, whereas the normative proposition expresses a desire and an end, so it would seem to be the most suited to originate action. What Aristotle means is that the universal normative proposition alone, although it guides action, cannot originate action just because it is universal: for action to take place, it is necessary that we perceive a particular state of affairs. This leads us to conclude that whereas both propositions are necessary for action to occur, the universal proposition is, as it were, “static”, since it expresses a principle which is assumed as trustworthy. In this sentence, therefore, τὸ ἐπιστημονικόν provides the universal normative proposition.

To complete our discussion of Aristotle's account of the psychological conditions of deliberation, we have to consider a passage from the *De memoria* and the central section of the *De motu animalium*. In *De mem.* 453a6–14, while describing the difference between recollecting and remembering, Aristotle claims:

It has already been stated in the previous discussions that the people who are good at remembering are not the same as those who are good at recollecting. And remembering differs from recollecting not concerning time, but in the fact that a lot of other animals also partake in remembering, but so to speak none of the known animals partake in recollecting, except man. Now, the reason is that recollecting is like a sort of syllogism; for the man who is recollecting deduces that he has previously seen or heard or experienced something of this sort, and this is like a sort of search. But this belongs naturally only to those who also possess the faculty of deliberation; for deliberating is also a sort of syllogism.<sup>93</sup>

92 *De an.* 434a16–21: τὸ δ' ἐπιστημονικόν οὐ κινεῖται, ἀλλὰ μένει. ἐπεὶ δ' ἡ μὲν καθόλου ὑπόληψις καὶ λόγος, ἡ δὲ τοῦ καθ' ἑκάστων (ἡ μὲν γὰρ λέγει ὅτι δεῖ τὸν τοιοῦτον τὸ τοιόνδε πράττειν, ἡ δὲ ὅτι τὸδε τοιόνδε, κἀγὼ δὲ τοιόσδε), ἡ δὲ αὕτη κινεῖ ἡ δόξα, οὐχ ἡ καθόλου, ἢ ἄμφω, ἀλλ' ἡ μὲν ἡρεμοῦσα μᾶλλον, ἡ δ' οὐ.

93 Διαφέρει δὲ τοῦ μνημονεύειν τὸ ἀναμνησθεσθαι οὐ [μόνον] κατὰ τὸν χρόνον, ἀλλ' ὅτι τοῦ μὲν



According to the distinction between memory and recollection Aristotle has previously made (*De mem.* 451b19–20), recollection consists in a combination of images triggered by a perception. The soul combines with a perception an image it has previously formed, if the image is either similar (ὁμοῖον) or opposed (ἐναντίον) or contiguous (σύνεγγυς) to the perception. This means that the process of recollection can combine several different images, until it comes to a final image, i.e. the one with which the perception that originated the process of recollection is immediately connected (according to one of the three types of relationship).

Recollection is proper to human beings insofar as it is a kind of reasoning. For those who recollect do not simply remember a certain affection, but infer *that* (συλλογίζεται ὅτι) they formerly saw or heard or had a comparable perception to the one that stimulated the recollection. The ὅτι introduces the content of the reasoning, i.e. the combination of similar, opposed, or contiguous images. Aristotle is probably thinking of the way in which recollection is introduced in *Phaed.* 74a ff. (i.e. before the exposition of the doctrine of ideas), where Plato explains that recollection is not just a memory but also the act by which the recollecting subjects *think about whether* (ἐννοεῖν εἴτε ...) what they perceive is identical, or bigger, or smaller than the image evoked by perception.

It is not immediately evident why Aristotle claims that beings capable of deliberating possess recollection. Even if it is true that deliberation presupposes the ability to reason, it remains unclear why he chooses to associate deliberation with recollection. We may suggest the following explanation. Aristotle connects recollection with deliberation not because of the kind of reasoning they represent, but because of the kind of psychic motion they make necessary. As forms of reasoning, they are not comparable since recollection is not a practical reasoning and does not answer the question *how?*; rather, it allows us to discover the cause that gave rise to a certain association of images in the soul of the recollecting subject. It is no coincidence that Aristotle insists on the fact that recollection turns back to the past, while deliberation uses images to outline a future situation.

---

μνημονεύειν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζώων μετέχει πολλά, τοῦ δ' ἀναμνησέσθαι οὐδὲν ὡς εἰπεῖν τῶν γνωριζομένων ζώων, πλὴν ἄνθρωπος. αἴτιον δ' ὅτι τὸ ἀναμνησέσθαι ἐστὶν οἷον συλλογισμός τις· ὅτι γὰρ πρότερον εἶδεν ἢ ἤκουσεν ἢ τι τοιοῦτον ἔπαθε, συλλογίζεται ὁ ἀναμνησκόμενος, καὶ ἔστιν οἷον ζήτησις τις. τοῦτο δ' οἷς καὶ τὸ βουλευτικὸν ὑπάρχει, φύσει μόνους συμβέβηκεν· καὶ γὰρ τὸ βουλευέσθαι συλλογισμός τις ἐστίν. Text and translation by D. Bloch, *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection. Text, Translation, Interpretation, and Reception in Western Scholasticism*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2007 (I have replaced “deduction” with “syllogism”).

On the other hand, recollection and deliberation are comparable for their use of imagination as an ability to connect images of affections that either have different content or have similar content but have been received at different moments, i.e. under different circumstances, which have changed some of their effects. In the case of deliberation, this ability to connect images has a practical objective. Recollection does not seem to have an immediate practical goal but, since it entails the ability to reconstruct certain situations, it can contribute to deliberation.

## 8 The Conversion of Deliberation into Syllogism

It is time to take up again the issue of the relationship between the so-called practical syllogism and deliberation. We will have to establish whether deliberation can take on the deductive form of a syllogism, and whether prescription can both arise from a kind of problematic reasoning of the sort involved in deliberation proper and derive from a general norm through a middle term.

The standard formulation of a practical syllogism (more precisely, a syllogism having action as its object) is to be found in a celebrated passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

For syllogisms which deal with acts to be done are things which involve a starting-point, viz. 'since the end, i.e. what is best, is of such and such a nature', whatever it may be (let it for the sake of argument be what we please) ...<sup>94</sup>

This formulation is very interesting since it combines the deductive form of syllogism with the problematic method, which, as we have seen, is typical of deliberative reasoning. The words ἀρχὴν ἔχοντες allude to a universal premise from which a particular truth is inferred. The conjunction ἐπειδή, which introduces the major premise, characterizes this kind of reasoning as a procedure where certain conditions will be assumed ἐξ ὑποθέσεως. It is a partial formulation of a syllogism since it only allows us to identify the nature of the major premise of the practical syllogism. It is the major premise, however, that distinguishes practical syllogisms from other kinds of syllogism with respect to their object, not their form. Practical syllogisms are constituted by a normative

---

94 *Eth. nic.* 1144a31–33: οἱ γὰρ συλλογισμοὶ τῶν πρακτῶν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντές εἰσιν, ἐπειδὴ τοιόνδε τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ ἀριστον, ὅτιδήποτε ὄν (ἔστω γὰρ λόγου χάριν τὸ τυχόν ...).

major premise that predicates the desirability of a certain class of objects or actions; and a minor premise, which consists in a descriptive judgement about a sample of the class of objects or actions whose desirability is predicated in the major premise. Such a syllogism infers the desirability of what the minor premise describes as existing, but it also explains why we want to perform a certain action, i.e. it explains its finality (not its efficient cause).

Crucially, Aristotle insists on the fact that the object of which the major extreme “end” or “best” is predicated, is in no way determinate (ὁτιδήποτε, τὸ τυχόν). It is a middle term or rather, the first of a series of middle terms, which has to unite the major, indeterminate, extreme with a particular thing or action. As a result, whereas the predicate “end” or “best” is the *standard major extreme* of syllogisms about actions, because it is always the same and gives its normative form to the whole deduction, the prescriptive content of the syllogism is provided by the *first middle term*, which circumscribes the domain of the final choice. For example: someone explaining that a certain diet must be pursued because it is healthy, has certainly started by formulating a first premise where the standard major extreme “end” or “best” is predicated of the term “health” or “healthy”. “Health” (or “healthy”) is both the first middle term of the syllogism, and the real practical aim for the sake of which that particular diet is followed. The prescriptive meaning of the term “healthy” would not be evident, however, if “healthy” were not the first middle term, but the major extreme. The proposition “this diet is healthy”, *sic et simpliciter*, can be just true. It is also prescriptive only when it presupposes, albeit implicitly, the antecedent proposition: “all that is healthy, or health, is τέλος καὶ τὸ ἄριστον”. This example, which is reminiscent of numerous examples Aristotle makes himself, allows us to understand the relationship between syllogism, prescription and deliberation. This is not to say that deliberation is a syllogism, since deliberative reasoning has mainly the form of a hypothetical and problematic procedure. What I would like to show is that deliberation can be “converted” into an inference that assumes, as its major premise, the standard premise described by Aristotle in *Eth. nic.* 1144a31–33, and develops a series of particular syllogisms each of which represents a single stage in the process of deliberative reasoning.

We know deliberation is the search for the means to attain a remote end.<sup>95</sup> Deliberating subjects start by thinking about the action which is immediately useful for the attainment of the remote end. Moving backwards, they come to

95 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 112b28–31: “The subject of investigation is sometimes the instruments, sometimes the use of them; and similarly in the other cases: sometime the means, sometimes the mode of using it or of bringing it about (ζητεῖται δ’ ὅτε μὲν τὰ ὄργανα ὅτε δ’ ἡ χρεῖα αὐτῶν ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ὅτε μὲν δι’ οὐ ὅτε δὲ πῶς ἢ διὰ τίνος)”.

the ἔσχατον and πρῶτον αἷτιον, i.e. the action close to them.<sup>96</sup> The use of both ἔσχατον and πρῶτον αἷτιον in 1112b17–25 bears out the idea that deliberation can *also* take on the form of a syllogism. The expression πρῶτον αἷτιον is the way Aristotle labels the last middle term allowing us to draw the conclusion of the syllogism.<sup>97</sup> These terminological aspects are important because of the way Aristotle views the prescriptive nature of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the dianoetic virtue by which we both deliberate about action<sup>98</sup> and formulate deductive inferences,<sup>99</sup> i.e. infer the goodness of particulars from general normative principles. See for instance the following passages:

Now it is thought to be a mark of people of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well (καλῶς βουλευσασθαι) about what is good and expedient for themselves, not in some particular respect (οὐ κατὰ μέρος), e.g. about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good like in general (τὸ εἰς ζῆν ὅλως). This is shown by the fact that we credit people with practical wisdom in some particular respect when they have calculated well (εἰς λογίσωνται) with a view to some good end which is one of those that are not the object of any art. Thus in general those who are capable of deliberating have practical wisdom.<sup>100</sup>

... nor is practical wisdom concerned with universals only—it must also recognize the particulars (καθ' ἑκαστα); for it is practical, and practice is concerned with particulars.<sup>101</sup>

All things which have to be done are included among particulars or ultimates (καθ' ἑκαστα καὶ τῶν ἐσχάτων); for not only must people of practical wisdom know particular facts, but understanding and judgement are also concerned with things to be done, and these are ultimates. And *nous* is concerned with the ultimates in both directions; for both the first terms and the ultimates are objects of *nous* and not of *logos*, and in demon-

96 Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1226b10–13. See also *Eth. nic.* 1112b17–25.

97 *An. post.* 78a25. See M. Mignucci, *La teoria aristotelica della scienza*, Sansoni, Florence 1965, 155.

98 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1140a25, 1142b30–31; 1140a31–b2, 1141b8–14, 1142b32–33; *Rhet.* 1366b20–21, 1378a8–12.

99 *Eth. nic.* 1142a30, 1143a30–33, 1144a28–36, 1146a6–8.

100 *Eth. nic.* 1140a26–31.

101 1141b15–16.

strations *nous* grasps the unchangeable and first terms, while in practical reasonings it grasps the last and variable fact, i.e. the minor premise.<sup>102</sup>

The first passage points out that the wise are those who deliberate well not in a specific domain of action, but with a view to good life and happiness. The second and third texts emphasize the importance of the knowledge of particulars beyond that of general normative principles. The expression καθ' ἑκάστω in the second and third texts does not have the same meaning as κατὰ μέρος in the first, since with the terms οὐ κατὰ μέρος Aristotle distinguishes the good deliberation of the wise from the practical calculation of those who possess a certain competence (for instance, physicians). The words οὐ κατὰ μέρος/ὅλως describe practical wisdom as the knowledge of general rules of conduct, whose possession enables us to deliberate well about particular cases in life. It is worth noting that, in the last text quoted, the ἑκάστω are also called ἔσχατα, which alludes to the extremes of a syllogism. A syllogism is an inference through a middle term, which is the cause. Since practical wisdom, as we shall see in the next chapter, is prescriptive, we have to presume that the wise not only deliberate well but, when prescribing a certain action to other people, they can also explain the causal link between the prescribed action and the end. The wise can move backwards through the stages of deliberative reasoning, and can provide too a causal explanation for each stage. Consequently, prescription is the outcome of deliberation, because deliberation is not just the reflection of someone on their conduct, but can set the rules for other people's conduct. Since Aristotle claims that the outcome of deliberation is choice, we may say that the concept of prescription is analogous to προαίρεσις.<sup>103</sup>

To clarify the connection between prescription and the practical syllogism, it is appropriate to look at the distinction Aristotle draws between understanding and practical wisdom:

Understanding is neither about things that are always and are unchangeable, nor about any and every one of the things that come into being, but about things which may become subjects of questioning and deliberation. Hence it is about the same objects as practical wisdom; but understanding and practical wisdom are not the same. For practical wisdom prescribes, since its end is what ought to be done or not to be done; but understanding only judges.<sup>104</sup>

102 1143a32–b3.

103 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1112a15–16; 1113a1–5.

104 *Eth. nic.* 1143a4–10: οὔτε γὰρ περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ ὄντων καὶ ἀκινήτων ἢ σύνεσις ἐστὶν οὔτε περὶ τῶν

To distinguish the domain of understanding from that of practical wisdom, Aristotle recalls the well-known difference between the *κριτική* and *ἐπιτακτική* functions of royal science described by Plato in *Pol.* 260b–c.<sup>105</sup> If understanding's function is just critical, though it concerns the same particulars as practical wisdom, its contribution to deliberation consists in providing the information about external reality without which it would not be possible to make a choice and start action. We cannot reasonably undertake an action if we do not know whether the material circumstances make it possible.<sup>106</sup> Understanding and practical intellect provide information that can play the role of the minor premise in a syllogism, and make us infer the desirability of an action and formulate a prescription.

The knowledge of particulars in deliberation is not empirical, but evaluative. Those who deliberate well know that this particular, instrumental, good or act, here and now, is required by the end, since the property that, in the formulation of the end, represents the major extreme or the first middle term can be predicated of it. For example, the *practical* knowledge of chicken meat corresponds to its appreciation as a healthy kind of food. If we consider the general starting point of each syllogism about action, we realize that “healthy” is actually the first middle term allowing us to formulate a prescription. In fact, we have implicitly predicated the major extreme “end” or “best” of what is healthy (what is healthy is “the end” or “best”; light food is healthy; chicken meat is light; therefore chicken meat is healthy, i.e. chicken meat is “the end” or “best” as far as food is concerned). Aristotle's well-known claim that it would be better to know only the particular rather than only the universal, does not mean we should prefer the knowledge of particulars alone, but that the possession of too general norms has no prescriptive usefulness, as is the case of the universal idea that identifies the good with the golden mean or right reason.

---

γίγνομένων ότουούν, άλλα περί ών άπορήσειεν άν τις και βουλεύσαιτο. διό περί τά αυτά μέν τή φρονήσει έστιν, ούκ έστι δέ τó αυτό σύνεσις και φρόνησις. ή μέν γάρ φρόνησις έπιτακτική έστιν· τί γάρ δει πράττειν ή μή, τó τέλος αυτής έστιν· ή δέ σύνεσις κριτική μόνον. Cf. also 1143a11–15: “Now understanding is neither the having nor the acquiring of practical wisdom; but as learning is called understanding when it means the exercise of the faculty of knowledge, so ‘understanding’ is applicable to the exercise of the faculty of opinion for the purpose of judging of what *some one else says about* matters with which practical wisdom is concerned—and of judging soundly; for ‘well’ and ‘soundly’ are the same thing. And from this has come the use of the name ‘understanding’ ...”.

105 A similar distinction is advanced in *Polit.* 1326b13–15, where Aristotle says that the main ruling tasks are *ἐπιταξίς* και *κρίσις*.

106 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 112b24–25.

There is another reason to think that deliberation can take on the form of a syllogistic inference. As we have seen, some scholars have interpreted deliberation as a kind of reasoning based on the specification of the concept of the end. If this is so, the search for the means to the end is not just the search for the tools that are most suited to its achievement, though foreign to it (for instance, the search for the shortest way to get to some place, or the best way to earn money, etc.). In some cases, deliberation also includes an analytical reflection on the elements that define the notion of the end in the belief that they represent the conditions to realize in order to achieve the end. This interpretation is supported by the passage of *Metaph.* 1032a32–b21 already quoted above, where Aristotle explains that to bring about a certain state we have to realize the conditions expressed by the components of the essence of that state. Bodily health is the product of a treatment that restores the balance of bodily humours, because such a balance is a constitutive element of the essence of health. This Aristotelian example is generally taken to be an instance of scientific deliberation, since it possesses the characters of deliberation, i.e. the assumption of a hypothesis and the backwards movement up to the first action which is to be adopted by the deliberator. If deliberative reasoning can take on the form of analysis, in principle it can also be an inference and coincide with a syllogism—or rather, be “reformulated” as, or “converted” into a syllogism.

The hypothesis that deliberation can be converted into a syllogism is also supported by a very significant text which is rarely taken into account in discussions of the practical syllogism.<sup>107</sup> It is the example of the teleological syllogism in *An. post.* II 11. 94b8–21. Within the wider context of chapter 11 Aristotle argues that the middle term through which a conclusion is inferred must always correspond to a cause, since we think we know something when we know its cause. The kinds of cause are four and the middle term of a syllogism must coincide with one of them. Aristotle quotes as last a syllogism whose conclusion can express the choice to act in a certain way and whose middle term provides the cause of this choice, i.e. the end:

In cases in which the aim is explanatory—e.g. why does someone walk about? In order to be healthy. Why is there a house? In order that their

---

<sup>107</sup> An exception is C. Natali, *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, cit., 82–86. See also C. Natali, “*Aitia* in Plato and Aristotle. From Everyday Language to Technical Vocabulary”, in C. Viano-C. Natali-M. Zingano (eds.), *Aitia I. Les quatre causes d'Aristote: origines et interprétations*, Peeters, Leuven 2013, 39–73, esp. 53 and 57 f.

belongings may be preserved—in the one case with the aim of being healthy, in the other with the aim of their being preserved. ('Why must someone walk about after dinner?' and 'With what aim must they?' Do not differ.) Walk after dinner, c; the foodstuffs' not remaining on the surface, b; being healthy, A. Well, let there belong to walking about after dinner, making the foodstuffs not to remain on the surface at the mouth of the stomach; and let this be healthy. For b, the foodstuffs' not remaining on the surface, seems to belong to walking about, c; and A, healthy, to this. So what is explanatory—the aim—for c of A's belonging to it?—b, their not remaining on the surface. And this is as it were an account of it; for A will be set out in this way. Why is b explanatory for c? Because this, being in such a state, is what being healthy is.<sup>108</sup>

A few lines before (94a36–b8) Aristotle gave the example of a syllogism whose middle term expresses an efficient cause (the Medes declared war on the Athenians since—i.e.: because of the fact that—the Athenians offended the Medes by invading Sardis). The syllogism that draws an inference through an efficient cause and provides the explanation of a state of affairs or a past event does not express a purpose nor does it infer a prescription. The syllogism that draws an inference through a final cause provides an explanation and seems also to suggest a prescription, if what is inferred can be counted among future things. In lines 94b16–18 Aristotle claims that the middle term, i.e. the digestion of food, is "like the logos" of health because it expresses its definition. This seems to clarify the assumption that the means to an end can be the elements of the definition of the end.

In addition, at 94b18 Aristotle states that health, i.e. the major extreme, is the end (τὸ Α [= τὸ ὑγιαίνειν] ὑπάρχειν τὸ οὐ ἐνεκα). Apparently, the end is expressed not by the middle term, but the major extreme that indicates it. The middle term, however, is the real causal link between the extremes as well as the immediate reason why a walk after lunch is an action worth choosing. As we have seen, the predicate of the first premise of a practical syllogism has a general

<sup>108</sup> This text has been largely studied from logical, etiological, and teleological point of view, see, for instance, J. Barnes, in his commentary to *Aristotle. Posterior Analytics*, Oxford 1993<sup>2</sup>, 218–222; Id., *Causes et preuves*, in C. Viano-C. Natali-M. Zingano (eds), *Aitia I*, cit., 75–90; D. Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1984, 197–202; Id., *Definition and Explanation in the Posterior Analytics and Metaphysics*, in D. Charles (ed.), *Definition in Greek Philosophy*, OUP, Oxford 2010, repr. 2013, 305–307; M. Leunissen, *Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Science of Nature*, CUP, Cambridge 2010, repr. 2011, 187–197.



normative character, “end” or “best”, and does not indicate a specific type of actions or goods, which is referred to by the first middle term. This allows us to conclude that in the syllogism as exemplified in the passage of the *Posterior Analytics*, the middle term, i.e. the digestion of food, is an “intermediate” end, an objective that is pursued for the sake of a further end, the end expressed by the major extreme, i.e. health. But there is more to it. The major extreme of Aristotle’s example, i.e. health, if it is considered from the point of view of the common *arche* of every practical syllogism, is in a sense a middle term, because it is that of which “end” or “best” is predicated.

The concept of “intermediate” end is used by Aristotle in a *Metaphysics* passage which is extremely significant for the issue we are dealing with:

The end is that for the sake of which a thing is, e.g. health is the cause of walking. For why does one walk? We say ‘in order that one may be healthy’, and in speaking thus we think we have given the cause. The same is true of all the *intermediate* things that intervene before the end, when something else has put the process in motion (as e.g. thinning or purging or drugs or instruments intervene before health is reached); for all these are for the sake of the end, though they differ from one another in that some are instruments and others are actions.<sup>109</sup>

In this *Metaphysics* passage, as in the text from the *Posterior Analytics* quoted above, Aristotle illustrates the meanings of cause and argues that the final cause is the answer to the question *why?*, when this question means *for the sake of what?* (τίνος ἔνεκα;). The *Metaphysics* passage makes it clear that the search for the ultimate end of an action takes place through the discovery of the so-called “intermediate” objects, i.e. the conditions preceding the end and contributing to its realization. The passage is interesting in that it divides τὰ μεταξύ into ὄργανα and ἔργα, i.e. instrumental objects and acts. The former have their own place in deliberative reasoning because, as Aristotle explains elsewhere, what is important for happiness and the common good is not the possession of goods, but their use. In addition, the procedure illustrating how to answer the question *why?* or *for the sake of what?* is the same as in *An. post.* II ch. 11, where Aristotle demonstrates that the question *why?* converts heuristic

109 *Metaph.* 1013a29–1013b3: ἔτι ὡς τὸ τέλος· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα, οἷον τοῦ περιπατεῖν ἡ ὑγίεια. διὰ τί γὰρ περιπατεῖ; φαιμέν. ἵνα ὑγιαίνῃ. καὶ εἰπόντες οὕτως οἰόμεθα ἀποδεδωκέναι τὸ αἴτιον. καὶ ὅσα δὴ κινήσαντος ἄλλου μεταξύ γίγνεται τοῦ τέλος, οἷον τῆς ὑγείας ἡ ἰσχυράσια ἢ ἡ κάθαρσις ἢ τὰ φάρμακα ἢ τὰ ὄργανα· πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τοῦ τέλους ἔνεκά ἐστι, διαφέρει δὲ ἀλλήλων ὡς ὄντα τὰ μὲν ὄργανα τὰ δ’ ἔργα.

reasoning (which searches for the answer to the question *how?*) into deductive reasoning, i.e. a syllogism.

The role of the definition of the essence is not always explicit. For example, it does not occur in the text from the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle quotes intermediate objectives that can be either an instrument, e.g. a drug, or an action, e.g. a diet, neither of which is described as an element of the definition of the end, but rather as a thing the agent produces for the sake of the end. It is safe to say, however, that the things produced for the sake of the ultimate end can have a place within the deliberative plan only through the knowledge of the definition of the end and the ability to analyze that definition. As a result, the use of an instrument, or the prescription of a diet, will be deliberated about thanks to the fact that the physician knows the definition of health or, more specifically, those elements of the definition of health that are most closely connected with a particular disease (for instance, in the case of fever, the physician relies on his knowledge of the temperature of a healthy body).

I shall conclude this part of my study with some remarks on the fact that the conversion of deliberation into deductive reasoning is, firstly, of great significance in the domain of scientific deliberation, which requires high-level theoretical knowledge and competence and, secondly, brings into the matter the topic of opinion, particularly normative opinion. Deliberation in the scientific domain functions as it does in other domains, i.e. in a hypothetical and problematic way. This means that, while considering how to achieve a certain result, a scientist will go about according to the model “if this, then that”, and reason backwards to identify a preliminary condition on each occasion. What makes this procedure possible is the knowledge of the causes, which is the one real scientific knowledge. We can say that a search has been well conducted when it has identified at every stage the cause of each intermediate objective. We can only establish that a search has been well conducted, by converting hypothetical reasoning into a line of deductive reasoning where the desirability of the *eschaton*, i.e. the action farthest removed from the end and closest to the agent, is inferred in a causal way. Let us assume a doctor deliberates and prescribes a certain drug he considers to be the cause (i.e. the efficient cause) of the remission of the disease. The correctness of the doctor’s reasoning is not immediately proved through deliberative reasoning, which takes place according to the hypothetical and problematic model. Rather, the doctor has to convert his deliberation into such an inference of this kind: “this principle cures the disease; this drug contains the principle; this drug etc.”

Deliberation, therefore, is a way of reasoning that differs from syllogism: those who deliberate, while they do so, do not infer from premises. Yet deliberation can be reformulated as a syllogism for the reasons and in the ways we

have tried to illustrate. To gain a better understanding of the conversion of the problematic procedure into a deductive one, we have to clarify how the setting of an end can be interpreted as a normative opinion.

## 9 The “Advantage” of Syllogism. Normative Opinions

We have tried to account for one of the reasons why Aristotle uses syllogistic language or mentions syllogistic reasoning while discussing deliberation. When deliberation takes place in the domain of science, or art, and requires a high competence, it is necessary to accompany it with a deductive inference, which supports the causal relations between the stages of deliberation. In the scientific and technical domain, deliberation requires the knowledge of the causes and of the truth of the propositions emerging in the course of deliberation. We have seen above that the term *eschaton* has a different position depending on whether the reasoning in which it appears is a deliberation, or an inquiry *ex post* into the motives of actions. In this case, the extreme term coincides with the final cause (whereas in deliberation *eschaton* is the *first* action to perform). But the syllogism into which deliberation is converted, is not an *ex post* explanation. In this type of (practical) syllogism, there has to emerge the knowledge of the material and efficient causes, which will be expressed by the middle terms. The *eschaton* remains the first act to perform as in the deliberation problematically formulated, but its practical suitability is causally deduced from the antecedents.

There is another important reason why deliberation and syllogism, although they do not coincide, are not separated by Aristotle. The conversion of deliberation into a syllogism gives an advantage, for it transmits the normative character of the major extreme to both the minor extreme and all the middle terms, that is, the intermediate objectives deliberative reason identifies along the way. The intermediate objectives represent the minor terms of several syllogisms making up the chain of syllogisms into which the whole deliberative reasoning is converted. When we convert a deliberative process into a deductive and syllogistic one we have to transform each stage of deliberation into a single syllogism, whose minor extreme has received, as its predicate, the normative character of the major extreme. The minor extreme of a single syllogism is one of the middle terms of the chain of syllogisms into which the whole deliberation is converted, so that each middle term is an intermediate objective on the way to the ultimate end. This means that each intermediate objective is desirable and worth pursuing (albeit in a derivative and instrumental sense) only because it is inferred in a causal way.

The conversion of deliberation into a syllogism makes it clear that: a) in order to achieve the remote end we (have to) want other things too; b) we can want a remote end but not always what seems to be useful and effective to attain it, since for various reasons we could dislike both the *eschaton* (i.e. the act we should perform) and any of the middle terms preceding the *eschaton*—this can be an important reason why, after concluding a certain deliberative process, we fail to take action; c) in this case, we have to start deliberating again and search for some preliminary conditions for the remote end which must be equally effective but alternative to those which did not become the object of our choice.

To gain a better insight into the advantage that syllogisms give deliberation and prescription, we have to take up again the topic of normative opinion. In *Eth. eud.* 1225b36–1226a17 there is a very interesting discussion of the role of opinion. Aristotle's focus is the nature of choice, which he tries to determine by comparing it with other acts that contribute to action. First, choice is different from any kind of desire. But there are also plenty of reasons why it is different from opinion:

So that this is clear, that the object of choice must be one of the things in our own power. Similarly, choice is not an opinion nor, generally, what one thinks; for the object of choice was something in one's power and many things may be thought that are not in our power, e.g. that the diagonal is commensurable. Further, choice is not either true or false. Nor yet is choice identical with our opinion about matters of practice which are in our own power, as when we think that we ought to do or not to do something (οὐδὲ δὴ ἡ τῶν ἐφ' αὐτῷ ὄντων πρακτῶν δόξα, ἢ τυγχάνομεν οἰόμενοι δεῖν τι πράττειν ἢ οὐ πράττειν). This argument applies to desire as well as to opinion; for no one chooses an end, but things that contribute to an end, e.g. no one chooses to be in health, but to walk or to sit for the purpose of keeping well; no one chooses to be happy but to make money or run risks for the purpose of being happy. And in general, in choosing we show both what we choose and for what we choose it, the latter being that for which we choose something else, the former that which we choose for something else. But it is the end that we especially desire, and we think we ought to be healthy and happy. So that it is clear through this that choice is different both from opinion and from desire; for desire and opinion pertain especially to the end, but choice does not.

What Aristotle is claiming here is not only that choice is not the same as opinion, because opinion can be about things that do not depend on us. More

importantly, even when it is about actions that it is in our power to perform, opinion is not a choice, because choice, as deliberation, concerns the means to achieve an end, whereas opinion is about the end, and therefore is in a sense more akin to βούλησις. Aristotle, however, does not say that βούλησις is a δόξα, since between βούλησις and δόξα there must be a similar difference to the one between προαίρεσις and δόξα; being a species of desire, βούλησις can be good or bad, not true or false.

What does it mean, then, that “we think we ought to be healthy and happy”? What is the difference between this opinion and the desire to be healthy and happy? I believe Aristotle’s view on this point is that the opinion “we ought to do or not to do something” is a special opinion we may call *normative*. This opinion expresses the formulation of an end, though not insofar as we actually desire it—even if it is possible for us to formulate a normative opinion while actually desiring its object—but insofar as we give our assent to that opinion, i.e. we consider it to be true. We can see the opinion that “health and happiness are goods worth pursuing” as a true proposition: this means it is a critical act of our reason, unlike our desire for health and happiness. A critical act related to an end, however, can take place without an actual desire for that end. In the example of the opinion that health and happiness are goods worth pursuing, we may say these ends are always actually desired, since, presumably, there is not a single moment in our life where we do not desire to be healthy and happy. In other cases, it is perfectly plausible that we retain our opinion that a good is worth pursuing even when we have no desire, i.e. no volition, of that good. If we already possess a good, e.g. a house, we may not have the actual volition of it any longer, although we retain our opinion that such a good as a house should be pursued and possessed. So, even if there is no actual desire, there remains a normative opinion.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle repeats his distinction between opinion and choice, although he uses slightly different arguments from those of the *Eudemian Ethics*:

For this reason, too, choice cannot be opinion; for opinion is thought to relate to all kinds of things, no less to eternal things and impossible things than to things in our own power; and it is distinguished by its falsity or truth, not by its badness or goodness, while choice is distinguished rather by these. Now with opinion in general perhaps no one really says it is identical. But it is not identical even with any kind of opinion; for by choosing what is good or bad we are people of a certain character, which we are not by holding certain opinions. And we choose to get or avoid something good or bad, but we have opinions about what a thing is or whom it is

good for or how it is good for one; we can hardly be said to opine to get or avoid anything. And choice is praised for being related to the right object rather than for being rightly related to it, opinion for being truly related to its object.<sup>110</sup>

The distinction depends once again on the standards of judgement of choice and opinion: choice is either good or bad, opinion either true or false. Aristotle adds that choice corresponds to either taking or avoiding (λαβεῖν ἢ φυγεῖν). It is worth noting that both in the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* passage he mentions a problematic contradiction: πράττειν ἢ οὐ πράττειν, as the object of opinion, in the *Eudemian Ethics*; λαβεῖν ἢ φυγεῖν, as the object of choice, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Opinion is about *what* is (i.e. a certain good), or about *whom* it benefits or *how* it benefits someone (δοξάζομεν τί ἐστίν ἢ τίνι συμφέρει ἢ πῶς). The three questions τί ἐστίν, τίνι, πῶς delimit in a general way the domain of normative opinions. It is appropriate to recall that the interrogative adverb πῶς, *how?*, introduces an inquiry into the means to achieve an end and introduces a deliberative reasoning. This demarcation of the domain of normative opinions shows that, in Aristotle's view, opinion is an essential support for deliberation, since it provides information (e.g. the definition of the essence of a certain good) and a critical assessment of the relationship between a certain good and the person who can most benefit from it. Aristotle's remark that opinion must be true, whereas choice must be good, implies that the possession of a normative opinion does not say anything about the character of those who formulate it, but only about their degree of knowledge and experience. From the possession of a normative opinion we cannot infer the presence of an actual desire in accord with it. As the case of the incontinent shows, the mere possession of a normative opinion in accord with the good does not entail the presence in the soul of an *actual* volition in accord with the good.

If the mere possession of a normative opinion does not entail desire, and therefore action, we may suppose that a normative opinion can be used in deliberation "instead of" desire, and "as if" it were the end. That is to say, it is possible to deliberate about what is the best conduct in the light of a certain norm and on the assumption that someone wants to attain a certain goal. We can deliberate about, for instance, what the requirements must be to pass an examination, what equipment is necessary to make a journey, etc.—without

<sup>110</sup> *Eth. nic.* 111b30–111a7.

being in the need to pass an examination or to make a journey, and therefore without being about to do any of the things which are objects of deliberation. Sometimes these deliberative processes are intellectual exercises and learning techniques. Sometimes they are performed with a view to an objective, which is different from the deliberated one and generally higher than it: this is the case when those kinds of deliberation are used to direct other people's conduct (e.g. those who need to pass an examination or travel). If there is no actual desire, some ends can be reformulated as normative opinions or norms. What are the ends that can be reformulated in this way? First of all, those remote ends that *may* be objects of volition; but particularly the remote ends which are non-individual and correspond to common and objective goods, and such remote ends as are the products of a complex art or a science. In other words, there are ends that can assume the form of ethico-political or technico-scientific norms. Aristotle gives numerous examples of both types.

If this interpretation is correct, the distinction between end and norm, which many interpreters view as the basis for the distinction between deliberation and practical syllogism, turns out to be a lot less significant. Syllogism about action need not necessarily imply an action: if it is the connection of a normative assertion with a descriptive assertion related to a certain situation, it will imply a prescription or rule of conduct. The arguments that have recently been proposed in favour of the distinction between deliberation and practical syllogism are certainly valid, though above all with respect to the *De motu animalium*. The arguments in *De motu* 701a10–30 have generally been understood as involving an action that Aristotle apparently sees as immediately performed:

... here the two propositions result in a conclusion which is an action—for example, whenever one thinks that every man ought to walk, and that one is a man oneself, *straightaway* one walks; or that, in this case, no man should walk, one is a man; *straightaway* one remains at rest ... I ought to create a good, a house is good; *straightaway* one makes a house ... The action goes back to a starting-point. If there is to be a coat, there must first be this, and if this then this—and *straightaway* one does this ... For when one is actually using perception or imagination or thought in relation to that for the sake of which, what one desires one does *at once*.

transl. by A.S.L. FARQUHARSON

The presence of such expressions as “at once”, “straightaway” (ἄμα, εὐθύς), has been debated and often seen as a sign that the conclusion of the syllogism is not a proposition but the action itself. But it should be noticed that the end is described either as an object of appetite, rather than volition; or, as in the

example of the house and the coat, which seem to be objects of volition, the end is not considered in its remote character, but as that whose preliminary conditions have all been realized. The immediacy of the action as well as its simultaneity with respect to the conclusion of the syllogism is also present in *Eth. nic.* 1147a25–31, where Aristotle illustrates the reasoning of the incontinent:

The one opinion is universal, the other is concerned with the particular facts, and here we come to something within the sphere of perception; when a single opinion results from the two, the soul must in one type of case affirm the conclusion, while in the case of opinions concerned with production it must *immediately* act (e.g. if everything sweet ought to be tasted, and this is sweet, in the sense of being one of the particular sweet things, those who can act and are not restrained must *at same time* actually act accordingly).

Two hypotheses can be made to account for the use of εὐθύς and ἄμα. Firstly, when he claims that *here* (ἐνταῦθα), i.e. in practical reasoning, the syllogism implies an action, Aristotle means that the conclusion of this kind of syllogism may also appear as prescriptive, since its propositional content shows whether an action is to be performed or not. This of course does not imply that such a conclusion will be actually put into practice. But, secondly, it is more probable that Aristotle used the adverb εὐθύς in the passages of *De motu animalium* and *Nicomachean Ethics* in the same logical sense as in many passages of the *Analytics*.<sup>111</sup> The conclusion of a syllogism of the kind exemplified in *De motu* and *Nicomachean*, is an action performed *at once*, not because it is immediate or imminent—or not only because of this—but in the sense that there are no other middle terms it is necessary to assume in order to conclude the syllogism.

The *De motu* examples quoted above make it clear that the end is not just an object of appetite but also of volition, whose attainment entails deliberative reasoning (“If there is to be a coat, there must first be this, and if this, then this”). However, this end, e.g. the coat, in the context of the *De motu* is not presented as

<sup>111</sup> Cf. *An. pr.* 29b20; 36a6; 42b21; 67a24. On the meaning of εὐθύς in the *Analytics*, see M. Mignucci, *Aristotele. Gli Analitici primi. Traduzione, introduzione e commento*, Loffredo, Naples, 1969, 348, note 6, who refers to Hermann Bonitz (*Index Aristotelicus*, in *Aristotelis Opera*, Berlin 1961<sup>2</sup>, vol. v, 296a13f.); see also J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, cit., 93: “... despite the ‘at once’, these thoughts could never lead anyone to walk. For we need the reasoning which is to lead to a *particular* action, and *this* certainly does not follow from the two premises. The decision that could lead to a particular action would only follow given certain massive background assumptions which are not in the reasoning itself”.



a remote end, but as the end whose last preliminary condition has been established, i.e. as the end whose preliminary conditions have *all* been established. The perspective in the *De motu* is that of the psychological state which makes action possible with a view to both an immediate end of appetite (I am thirsty, I see some drink, I drink), and a remote end of volition whose preliminary conditions have all been realized (I need a coat, I have got all the material for making the coat, I make the coat). This syllogism is used as an explanatory model of animal movement and human action, and the immediacy of action is logical rather than temporal.

The case of *Eth. nic.* 1147a25–31 is more complex, since the incontinent has two opposed major premises, one the product of volition, the other of appetite; one injunctive, the other prohibitive. What is most interesting for us now, however, is not the account of *akrasia*, but the remark introducing that account. In the first lines of the passage, Aristotle argues that in the practical domain the soul draws inferences that are just as necessary and immediate as those it draws when it reasons in the theoretical domain. When it has two premises, a universal one and one consisting in the sensible perception of an instance of the middle term, the soul *necessarily* infers; in the practical domain, this corresponds to acting *immediately* or *at once* (ἄμα)—which confirms that the immediacy of the conclusion of a practical syllogism depends on the logical meaning that εὐθύς and ἄμα have in syllogistic language.

In the context of both the *De motu* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the action is performed because desire is actual. In the example of *De motu* 701a30–33 “I want to drink, says desire; this is drink, says sense or imagination or thought: straightaway I drink”, Aristotle describes the situation where “the actualizing of desire is a *substitute for* inquiry or thinking (ἀντ’ ἐρωτήσεως γὰρ ἢ νοήσεως ἢ τῆς ὁρέξεως γίνεται ἐνέργεια)”. This does not exclude the possibility that we can deliberate, i.e. search for the solution of a πρόβλημα even in the absence of desire or, more precisely, of an actual volition.<sup>112</sup>

112 Cf. *Top.* 104b1 ff., *An. pr.* 24a25 ff.

# Prescriptive Reason and Practical Wisdom

## 1 Preliminary Remarks on Aristotle's Notion of Prescription

As I argued in the previous chapter, Aristotle regards prescription as the essential character of practical reason. Practical reason prescribes pursuing a certain line of conduct and avoiding another for the sake of an end. The end, on the other hand, is posited by desire, not by deliberative reason. This does not mean that reason is not involved in delineating moral ends, but only that calculative reasoning's peculiar task is to detect the suitable means to an already established end. Furthermore, human action is brought about by actual desire. However, as I tried to show, the fact that we can deliberate about the best way to attain some good, without pursuing it, means that we can deliberate without the desire for the end being actual.

The pair “pursue”–“avoid”, διώκειν–φεύγειν provides the propositional content of every act of practical reason when the practical reason functions as ἐπιτάττων and gives prescriptions. A single prescription either has an injunctive/prohibitive form (“do it”, “you should/should not do it”, etc.<sup>1</sup>), or is an assertion (“this is the good thing to do, that is the wrong one”<sup>2</sup>). The propositional content of a prescription has to be distinguished from that of a deliberative judgement, for deliberation and prescription, although closely related with each other, correspond to different parts of a deliberative reasoning. In itself, a deliberative judgement is the assertion that something is useful for the realization of a certain end, because it is its material or efficient cause. To have deliberative effectiveness, such an assertion must be part of a line of problematic reasoning, originated by the positing of an end. The propositional content of prescription is arguably analogous to that of choice, i.e. that of the conclusion of the deliberative reasoning. The difference between prescription and choice mainly lies in

- 
- 1 See e.g. *Eth. nic.* 1129b18–24: “The law bids us to do both the acts of a brave man (e.g. not to desert our post or take to flight or throw away our arms), and those of a temperate man (e.g. not to commit adultery or outrage), and those of a good-tempered man ... and similarly with regard to the other virtues and forms of wickedness, commanding some acts and forbidding others”; see also 1138a5–7.
  - 2 See e.g. *Eth. eud.* 1237b36–1238a2: “Nor should one choose a friend like a garment. Yet in all things it seems the mark of a sensible man to choose the better ... the better is to be chosen, but not in place of an old friend one of whom you do not know whether he is better. For a friend is not to be had without trial nor in a single day ...”; *Eth. nic.* 1110a29–31; 1128b.

the fact that, given the possibility of deliberating by replacing the actual desire with the possession of a normative opinion, prescription is generally deliberated without an actual desire on the part of the deliberator. When prescribing, one has deliberated not necessarily because of a personal wish or need.

Aristotle's view that prescription is different from choice is confirmed by the role he ascribes to virtuous habit:

What affirmation and negation are in thinking, pursuit and avoidance are in desire; so that since ethical virtue is a *state* concerned with choice (ἐξίς προαιρετική), and choice is deliberate desire, therefore both the reasoning must be true and the desire right, if the choice is to be good, and the latter must pursue just what the former asserts. Now this kind of intellect and of truth is practical.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear from this passage that the possession of a virtuous habit plays a prominent part in choice, for virtuous deliberators assess the conduct they consider while deliberating in the light of normative opinions<sup>4</sup> to which they give their assent thanks to their habit. This assessment has not only to do with the ability to establish a link between a means and an end or to identify the material and efficient causes of an end, but also with the other aspect of deliberative reasoning, i.e. the comparative aspect. The possibility to choose, both at the conclusion of the deliberation process and in its intermediate stages, between options that are equally effective but differ because of their moral quality, requires the intervention of the virtuous habit, which sometimes will run counter to the actual desire.

Prescription has also to be analyzed regardless of the presence of a particular actual desire and considered as an attitude of reason and a logico-linguistic act, i.e. as a prescriptive discourse. Prescriptive discourse indicates the *limit* of action, not its ultimate end:

But since the doctor has a limit by reference to which he distinguishes what is healthy for the body from what is not, and with reference to which each thing up to a certain point ought to be done and is healthy, while if less or more is done health is the result no longer, so in regard to actions and choice of what is naturally good but not praiseworthy, the good man

<sup>3</sup> *Eth. nic.* 1139a21–27.

<sup>4</sup> On the value of normative opinions and *endoxa* in ethical investigation, see R. Kraut, "How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method", in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Blackwell, Oxford 2006, 76–95.

should have a limit both of disposition and of choice and avoidance with regard to excess or deficiency of wealth and good fortune, the limit being, as above said, as reason directs; this corresponds to saying in regard to diet that the limit should be as medical science and its reason direct. But this, though true, is not illuminating. One must, then, here and elsewhere, live with reference to the ruling principle and with reference to the formed habit and the activity of the ruling principle ...<sup>5</sup>

The ὅρος, i.e. the limit within which (rather than the standard<sup>6</sup> by which) practical reason determines the mean between excess and defect, is closely linked with the topic of prescription, as is clear from this passage too:

There is a limit (ὅρος) which determines the mean states which we say are intermediate between excess and defect, being in accordance with right reason. But such a statement, though true, is by no means illuminating; for in all other pursuits which are objects of knowledge it is indeed true

- 5 *Eth. eud.* 1249a21–b8: ἐπεὶ δ' ἐστὶ τις ὅρος καὶ τῷ ἱατρῷ, πρὸς δὲ ἀναφέρων κρίνει τὸ ὑγιεινὸν σώματι καὶ μὴ, καὶ πρὸς δὲ μέχρι ποσοῦ ποιητέον ἕκαστον καὶ εὖ ὑγιαίνειν, εἰ δὲ ἔλαττον ἢ πλεον, οὐκ ἐτι οὕτω καὶ τῷ σπουδαίῳ περὶ τὰς πράξεις καὶ αἰρέσεις τῶν φύσει μὲν ἀγαθῶν οὐκ ἐπαινετῶν δὲ δεῖ τινα εἶναι ὅρον καὶ τῆς ἕξεως καὶ τῆς αἰρέσεως καὶ [περὶ] φυγῆς (καὶ περὶ) χρημάτων πλήθους καὶ ὀλιγότητος καὶ τῶν εὐτυχημάτων. ἐν μὲν οὖν τοῖς πρότερον ἐλέχθη τὸ ὡς ὁ λόγος· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις ἐν τοῖς περὶ τὴν τροφὴν εἴπειεν ὡς ἡ ἱατρικὴ καὶ ὁ λόγος ταύτης, τοῦτο δ' ἄλλῃθές μὲν, οὐ σαφές δέ. δεῖ δὲ ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις πρὸς τὸ ἄρχον ζῆν, τοῦ ἄρχοντος ...
- 6 The term *horos* in this text from *Eudemian Ethics* as well as in *Eth. nic.* 1138b23 and 34, is generally translated as “standard”, starting from Ross; see, for instance, R.A. Gauthier-J.Y. Jolif (eds.), *L'Éthique à Nicomaque. Introduction, traduction et commentaire*, Nauwelaerts, Paris 1970<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1, 2, 160 (“norme”); J.M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good*, cit., 138; C.C.W. Taylor, *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics. Books 11–14. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, repr. 2009, 108; T. Engberg-Pedersen, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1983, repr. 2002, 103; S. Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, cit., 188; M. Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. An Introduction*, CUP, Cambridge 2005, 213. More flexible is R. Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, cit., 329; different translations in T. Irwin, *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics*, Hackett Publishing Company 1985 (“definition”); S. Peterson, “Horos (Limit) in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*”, *Phronesis*, 33 (1988), 233–250, followed by R.C. Bartlett-S.D. Collins (eds.), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. A New Translation*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2011, 281 and 255; M.L. Gill, *Virtue and Reason in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, in D. Henry-M.K. Nielsen (eds.), *Bridging the Gap*, cit., 103 (“delimited object”); see also F. Rese, *Praxis und Logos bei Aristoteles. Handlung, Vernunft und Rede in Nikomachischer Ethik, Rhetorik und Politik*, Mohr Siebeck 2003, 127 (“Grenzmarke”); C.D.C. Reeve, *Aristotle on Practical Wisdom. Nicomachean Ethics VI, Translated, with an Introduction, Analysis and Commentary*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass.-London 2013, 44 (“defining-mark”). My preferred translation is “limit” (or even “boundary”).

to say that we must not exert ourselves nor relax our efforts too much nor too little, but to an intermediate extent and as right reason dictates; but if a man had only this knowledge he would be none the wiser, e.g. we should not know what sort of medicines to apply to our body if someone were to say 'all those which the medical art prescribes, and which agree with the practice of one who possesses the art'. Hence it is necessary with regard to the states of the soul also not only that this true statement should be made, but also that it should be determined what right reason is and what is the limit that fixes it.<sup>7</sup>

The term ὅρος indicates not so much the criterion of action as the framework within which the general standard of the mean is to be applied. Practical reason *qua* prescriptive does not simply think for the sake of an end: it has also to think with reference to a certain situational context. Practical reason is like a doctor, who always reasons with a view to health and with regard to a particular clinical picture and specific symptoms.

Finally, prescription has to be considered with respect to its end. As will emerge from the discussion of Aristotle's use of the notion of prescription in the political domain, the act of prescribing a certain action or line of conduct for other people indicates a certain degree of authority. This authority depends mainly on the knowledge of the causes in virtue of which a prescription is rightly given. For instance, the prescriptive authority of a doctor does not depend on the knowledge of the end for the sake of which a certain medical treatment is prescribed. It rather depends on the knowledge of the material and efficient causes (physiological and symptomatic details, chemical principles, etc.), which lead good doctors to adopt the appropriate treatment, and hopefully the most appropriate one among many available. Science and experience certainly enable us to identify the conditions for the attainment of an end, and, therefore, to deliberate about the appropriate means to an end. What about the *final* cause of a prescription? Prescription is the outcome of someone's reasoning about someone else's action, e.g. the therapy doctors prescribe

7 *Eth. nic.* 1138b23–34: τις ἔστιν ὁρος τῶν μεσοτήτων, ἃς μεταξύ φαμεν εἶναι τῆς ὑπερβολῆς καὶ τῆς ἐλλείψεως, οὓσας κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον. ἔστι δὲ τὸ μὲν εἰπεῖν οὕτως ἀληθὲς μὲν, οὐθὲν δὲ σαφές· καὶ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις ἐπιμελείαις, περὶ ὧσας ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη, τοῦτ' ἀληθὲς μὲν εἰπεῖν, ὅτι οὔτε πλείω οὔτε ἐλάττω δεῖ πονεῖν οὐδὲ ῥαθυμεῖν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μέσα καὶ ὡς ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος· τοῦτο δὲ μόνον ἔχων ἂν τις οὐδὲν ἂν εἰδείη πλεόν, οἷον ποῖα δεῖ προσφέρεισθαι πρὸς τὸ σῶμα, εἴ τις εἴπειεν ὅτι ὅσα ἡ ἰατρικὴ κελεύει καὶ ὡς ὁ ταύτην ἔχων. διὸ δεῖ καὶ περὶ τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς ἕξεις μὴ μόνον ἀληθῶς εἶναι τοῦτ' εἰρημένον, ἀλλὰ καὶ διωρισμένον τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος καὶ τούτου τίς ὁρος.

their patients, the law legislator gives to direct other people's conduct in various spheres of social life. The question: *To what end was this prescription given?*, may admit of as many different answers as the question: *To what end did that man do such an act?* The answer may indicate, for instance, the remote end the prescribed action directly aims at ("you have to take this drug because it will cure you"); or, the remote end for whose attainment the prescribed action is an extrinsic condition ("you have to end your meal in order that you can start work again"); or even the intermediate end whose attainment the prescribed action brings about, along a series of actions ("you have to cut this fabric in order that it can be sewn so as to make the dress"). In all these cases, those who prescribe can adduce the end, i.e. the final cause, of the prescribed action. But there is a difference, which Aristotle adumbrates in *Politics*,<sup>8</sup> between the end of a prescribed action and the end of an act of prescribing. The latter only apparently coincides with the former, and generally consists in a different and higher objective than that of the specific prescribed action. For instance, the end of the prescription of vaccine is the single patient's recovery; prescribing vaccines on a large scale by the health authorities aims to carry out a social function. In addition, especially in a hierarchical and political context, the act of prescribing can express a precise task within the hierarchy, a task which is

8 Cf. *Polit.* 1331b26–38, and 1332a7–12. In these texts Aristotle proposes the scheme of deliberative reasoning in the light of political responsibility. The fact that *everyone's* well-being (τὸ εὖ πάντων) consists in both the setting of the right end and the discovery of the suitable means does not mean that what is spoken of in this context is *individual* deliberation. Rather, everyone's well-being is mostly the object of *rulers'* deliberation, as clearly shown by the immediately preceding lines, 1331b24–26 ("Returning to the constitution itself, let us seek to determine out of what and what sort of elements the state which all well-being and well-governed should be composed"). In fact, political deliberation is *ipso facto* prescriptive deliberation, and its end is common happiness and general good habit, not merely the success of this or that particular activity. The good of the State is the unconditioned and supreme end for the sake of which legislators and rulers, who have prescriptive authority *par excellence*, exercise their act of prescribing (although single political prescriptions are aimed at particular goals). D.J. Riesbeck, *Aristotle on Political Community*, CUP, Cambridge 2016, 248–256, draws attention to the ambiguity of the Aristotelian notion of authority in *Politics*: sometimes Aristotle refers to the authority of those who have political leadership and are in a position to give directions to the entire social body; sometimes he narrows the sense of authority to those who hold a particular office. I think, rather, we should talk about two different kinds of authority, normative and prescriptive, the latter being proper to certain auxiliary authorities. On Aristotle's use of such term as *arche* and *archein* for different kinds of authorities, see A. Rosler, *Political Authority and Obligation in Aristotle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2005, 112–115.

at the same time directive and auxiliary. This distinction has sometimes to be connected with the one between action and production.

## 2 The Semantic and Conceptual Domain of Prescription. The Platonic Background

The significance of the concept of prescription is clear from the frequency of some terms in Aristotle's ethical and political works. The analysis of these words and the contexts where they occur, will allow us to place the topic of prescription within the Aristotelian system of practical sciences, and to reconstruct the historical background of Aristotle's terminology.

The semantic domain of prescription is almost exclusively constituted by terms related to the verbs ἐπιτάττειν and προστάττειν. Two fragments from the *Protrepticus* (fr. 4 and 6 Ross = B 8–9 and 61 Düring = 73 Gigon) provide us a description of the authoritative role reason exercises over the practical domain, which accounts for the necessity of doing philosophy.

The things that underlie our way of life, e.g. a body and what's around it, underlie it in the manner of certain tools, the use of which is dangerous, and more of the latter is accomplished by those who use them in ways they shouldn't. Well then, one should desire both to acquire this knowledge and to use it appropriately, this knowledge through which we will put all these things to good use. Hence we should do philosophy, if we are going to engage in politics correctly and conduct our own life in a beneficial way. Furthermore, there is a difference between the kinds of knowledge that *produce* each of the things of which we want to have more and more in our way of life, and the kinds of knowledge that *make use* of these kinds of knowledge, and the ones that *serve* are different from the others that *prescribe*; and in these as it were more commanding kinds of knowledge exists what is good in the strict sense. If, then, only that kind of knowledge which does have correctness of judgment, and does use reason, and observes the good as a whole—that is to say, philosophy—is capable of using everything and prescribing in accordance with nature, by all means one ought to do philosophy, since only philosophy includes within itself this correct judgment and this intelligence to prescribe without errors.<sup>9</sup>

9 Iambl. *Protr.* VI, 37 (fr. 4 Ross): Τὰ ὑποκείμενα πρὸς τὸν βίον ἡμῖν ὅσον σῶμα καὶ περὶ τὸ σῶμα

In this passage the notions of *possession* and *use* are connected to different things. The term *χρήσις* is referred to τὰ πρὸς τὸν βίον, i.e. the things human beings possess to live, such as the body and what is related to the body. These things must be put to good use in order that they do not turn into something harmful. The verbs *κτᾶσθαι* and *χρῆσθαι* are referred to the science allowing us to make use of those material goods. Consequently, in order to make use of the material and physical goods we either possess by nature or have to secure to live well, we must possess the science of the good use of material goods and, *in addition*, make use of this science.

This argument is taken over from the *Euthydemus* and, to a different extent, other Platonic dialogues.<sup>10</sup> Plato's thesis that practical wisdom (*φρόνησις*) guides and directs action in the use of physical and material goods is turned by Aristotle into a system of two or four types of practical sciences. Some sciences produce (*ποιεῖν*) goods; others make use of the sciences that produce goods (*χρῶμεναι ταύταις*)—at least according to the transmitted text of the *Protrepticus*, where the object of *χρῶμεναι* is a feminine pronoun. The text was emended by Kiessling<sup>11</sup> who replaced the feminine pronoun, in the sentence

---

καθάρπερ ὄργανά τινα ὑπόκειται, τούτων δ' ἐπικίνδυνός ἐστιν ἡ χρήσις, καὶ πλεον θάτερον ἀπεργάζεται τοῖς μὴ δεόντως αὐτοῖς χρωμένοις. δεῖ τοίνυν ὀρέγεσθαι τῆς ἐπιστήμης κτᾶσθαι τε αὐτὴν καὶ χρῆσθαι αὐτῇ προσηκόντως, δι' ἧς πάντα ταῦτα εὖ θησόμεθα φιλοσοφητέον ἄρα ἡμῖν, εἰ μέλλομεν ὀρθῶς πολιτεύεσθαι καὶ τὸν ἑαυτῶν βίον διάξειν ὠφελίμως. "Ἐτι τοίνυν ἄλλαι μὲν εἰσιν αἱ ποιοῦσαι ἕκαστον τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ πλεονεκτημάτων ἐπιστήμαι, ἄλλαι δ' αἱ χρώμεναι ταύταις (codd.; τούτοις emend. Kiessling, prob. Gigon, see *infra*, notes 11 and 12), καὶ ἄλλαι μὲν αἱ ὑπηρετοῦσαι, ἕτεροι δ' αἱ ἐπιτάττουσαι, ἐν αἷς ἐστὶν ὡς ἂν ἡγεμονικωτέραις ὑπαρχούσαις τὸ κυρίως ὄν ἀγαθὸν εἰ τοίνυν μόνῃ ἢ τοῦ κρίνειν ἔχουσα τὴν ὀρθότητα καὶ ἡ τῷ λόγῳ χρωμένη καὶ ἡ τὸ ὅλον ἀγαθὸν θεωροῦσα, ἥτις ἐστὶ φιλοσοφία, χρῆσθαι πᾶσιν καὶ ἐπιτάττειν κατὰ φύσιν δύναται, φιλοσοφητέον ἐκ παντὸς τρόπου, ὡς μόνῃς φιλοσοφίας τὴν ὀρθὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὴν ἀναμάρτητον ἐπιτακτικὴν φρόνησιν ἐν ἑαυτῇ περιεχούσης. Text and translation by D.S. Hutchinson-M.R. Johnson, *Aristotle: Protrepticus or Exhortation to Philosophy*, cit. See also I. Düring, *Aristotle's Protrepticus. An Attempt at Reconstruction*, cit., 115 for related texts from Plato's *Euthydemus*, and 133 for a parallel from Arist. *Polit.* 1323b13–18. The text from τὰ ὑποκείμενα τὸ ὠφελίμως = B8 Düring, is edited in squared brackets by Düring, as a doubtful text, but see D.S. Hutchinson-M.R. Johnson, "Authenticating Aristotle's *Protrepticus*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 29 (2005), 193–294.

10 Cf. *Euthyd.* 280e–281e; *Men.* 88a–89b; *Gorg.* 474d–e. The idea according to which happiness derives from the good use of physical and external goods, i.e., from their intelligent use appears before Plato. Some hints of it can be found in Democritus, cf. 68 B 37, 40, 77, 172, and 173; and apparently in Prodicus of Ceos, cf. 84 B 8 (= Ps. Plat. *Eryx.* 397d). The idea is common to Isocrates too, see the references in D.S. Hutchinson-M.R. Johnson, *Aristotle: Protrepticus or Exhortation to Philosophy*, cit., *Commentary*.

11 M.T. Kiessling, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis adhortatio ad philosophiam*. Textum ad fidem codd. mss., Vogel, Lipsiae 1813, 104 n. 5.



ἄλλαι (*scil.* ἐπιστήμαι) δ' αἱ χρώμεναι ταύταις, with the neuter τούτοις. Gigon<sup>12</sup> accepted Kiessling's correction, referring the participle χρώμεναι to πλεονεκτήματα, "the things of which we want to have more and more". This correction is plausible, since practical science, in Aristotle's view as well as in Plato's, is the science of the good use of material and physical goods. However, if we refer the feminine pronoun ταύταις to ἐπιστήμαι (as Hutchinson and Johnson do), the text has a sense that is both acceptable and perfectly compatible with the one we get from the correction, i.e. the following: not only are there two types of sciences related to action, i.e. productive and practical ones, but practical sciences—or some of them—have the task to make good use of productive sciences, for it is precisely practical sciences that know the best use of the produced goods. In other words, if there exist sciences that can make good use of the objects produced by other sciences, this is only possible because the former (i.e. practical sciences) know the true ends whose attainment necessarily requires the objects produced by the latter (i.e. productive sciences). Consequently, the transmitted text not only has basically the same meaning as the emended one; it also suggests that such practical sciences as can make use of productive sciences are hierarchically superior, since they possess a higher end than that of productive sciences. The end of productive sciences coincides with their products, whereas practical sciences know the further and maybe the ultimate end for the sake of which productive sciences produce their objects. As we shall see, the interpretation based on the text of the manuscripts is fully confirmed by several passages of Aristotle's treatises.<sup>13</sup> If we retain the text of the manuscripts, we get the following picture. First, sciences are divided into productive arts and techniques, and practical sciences that can make use of products (and hence of productive arts and techniques). Second, there are sciences which serve (ὕπηρετοῦσαι) the true good (τὸ κυρίως ὄν ἀγαθόν) and sciences which give prescriptions (ἐπιτάττουσαι) for the sake of the true good. Prescriptive sciences are "more authoritative", ἡγεμονικωτέραι—an expression that looks forward to the Aristotelian idea of the architectonic hierarchy of practical sciences.

12 Cf. O. Gigon (ed.), *Aristotelis Opera*. Vol. III: *Librorum deperditorum fragmenta*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1987<sup>2</sup>, 304.

13 D.S. Hutchinson-M.R. Johnson, "Protreptic Aspects of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*", in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, cit., 383–409, sustain the general consistency between *Protrepticus* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, claiming that Aristotle's ethical treatises presuppose a protreptic plan which is based on that used in *Protrepticus*.

In *Euthyd.* 280d–281e, Plato defends the thesis that what makes human beings happy is not the possession (κτήσις) of goods, but their use (χρεία), more precisely their use according to the dictates of reason. It is science that guides the use of material and physical goods and directs it correctly (281a8–b1: τὸ ὀρθῶς πᾶσι τοῖς τοιοῦτοις χρῆσθαι ἐπιστήμη ἣν ἡγουμένη καὶ κατορθοῦσα τὴν πρᾶξιν). It is worth noting that in this section of the dialogue Socrates gives the example of the craftsmen, who successfully accomplish their task not because they possess the tools of their art, but because they can use them (280c–d). In this analogy, the happy man is compared with the craftsman who successfully practices his art: as a result, the goods that make men happy have an instrumental value and are not good in themselves. The analogy is more fertile than it appears to be *prima facie*. We may suppose that craftsmen use their tools to produce something which is *well-made and useful*:<sup>14</sup> in Plato's analogy we can glimpse the distinction between the tools craftsmen must not only possess but, above all, use competently, and the product which is the aim of their art. The quality of the product will be the mark of the craftsmen's ability to make good use of their tools. In this *Euthydemus* passage we can find the premises for a system where sciences about human action are distinguished according to whether they produce something, use a product, or determine who is to be tasked with the production and who with the use of the goods. The idea of an architectonic system of the practical sciences, which is present in embryo in the *Euthydemus*, will acquire greater political significance in Aristotle. This is already evident from fr. 4 Ross of the *Protrepticus*, where Aristotle distinguishes productive from practical sciences as well as ascribing a prescriptive role to some practical sciences. The latter are “more authoritative”, i.e. superior to the former, since they have a clearer notion of the end for the sake of which both the other less authoritative practical sciences and productive sciences exist.

As we noticed above, the types of sciences referred to in fr. 4 of the *Protrepticus* may be either four (ποιεῖν, χρῶμεναι; ὑπηρετοῦναι, ἐπιτάττουσαι) or two. Does Aristotle mean that ὑπηρετοῦσαι sciences are somehow ποιεῖν whereas ἐπιτάττουσαι sciences are χρῶμεναι, so that the kinds of practical sciences are

14 Cf. *Euthyd.* 280e1–281a1: “‘Then have we here enough means, Cleinias, for making a man happy—in the possession of these goods and using them?’ ‘I think so.’ ‘Shall we say, I asked, if he uses them rightly (ὀρθῶς χρῆται), or just as much if he does not?’ ‘If rightly.’ ‘Well answered,—I said—; for I suppose there is more mischief when a man uses anything wrongly than when he lets it alone. In the one case, there is evil; in the other there is neither evil nor good.’” Transl. by W.R. Lamb, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 1967.

reduced to two? A correspondence between the first and the second pair of sciences is plausible, for in each pair there is a distinction between a subordinate, productive and instrumental type of knowledge, and a higher type of knowledge using the product of the productive science because it knows its real end. Therefore, Aristotle's view in the *Protrepticus* is probably that an ἐπιστήμη χρωμένη is also ἐπιτάττουσα, since it has the notion of the end for the sake of which the ἐπιστήμη ποιούσα produces what it produces. As most notably the two *Ethics* and the *Politics* will show, however, Aristotle considered some practical sciences as forms of knowledge which are prescriptive in that they use productive arts, but in turn serve more authoritative sciences. Those who prescribe the production of a certain good or the performance of a certain task, sometimes do so in order to perform themselves a ὑπηρετικόν task, i.e. act for the sake of a further and higher end.

Fr. 6 Ross of the *Protrepticus* provides other elements for defining Aristotle's concept of prescription, with respect to both reason and language:

Soul is better than body (for it is more authoritative), as is the part of the soul which has reason and thought, for this kind of thing is what prescribes and proscribes and says how we ought or ought not to act.<sup>15</sup>

In these few words we find the essential character of practical reason, which consists in showing us what we ought or ought not to do. The content of this fragment, therefore, is consistent with what has emerged from other texts. Aristotle conceives of prescription as the injunctive or prohibitive act of practical reason with respect to an object which is identified and deliberated about in the absence of an actual desire. The use of the verbs of saying κελεύει, κωλύει, φησί, indicates that prescription has also to be understood as a discourse. Aristotle's use of the verbs ἐπιτάττειν and προστάττειν with reference to the prescriptive ability of the rational soul (along with other verbs such as νομοθετεῖν or the more common ἄρχειν in relation to legislative authority<sup>16</sup>) derives from an older tradition. Both verbs occur in the rhetorical literature and historiography of the v and iv centuries to indicate political rule and legislative authority. The noun πρόσταγμα and the adjectives ἐπιτακτικός and προστακτικός until the end of the v century are used with reference to legal obligation or political hege-

15 Iambl. *Protr.* VII, 41, 29–30: ψυχή μὲν σώματος βέλτιον (ἀρχικώτερον γάρ), ψυχῆς δὲ τὸ λόγον ἔχον καὶ διάνοιαν· ἔστι γὰρ τοιοῦτον ὃ κελεύει καὶ κωλύει, καὶ δεῖν ἢ μὴ δεῖν φησι πράττειν.

16 In at least one case, *An. post.* 83a14, Aristotle uses the verb νομοθετεῖν in relation to reason that prescribes the correct way of κατηγορεῖν.

mony.<sup>17</sup> In some cases “what is commanded”, τὸ προσταττόμενον, corresponds to the charge or task conferred upon those who play a political or institutional role, thereby expressing not an act of authority but the acknowledgement of a competence. In addition to these meanings,<sup>18</sup> already in Isocrates the term προσταγματα can be referred to precepts given with an educational aim,<sup>19</sup> and particularly to the precepts “of philosophy”, i.e. rhetoric and the art of speaking, which for Isocrates is the discipline most suited to educate citizens.<sup>20</sup>

It is in Plato, however, that we can find the proximate sources of Aristotle's concept of prescription as well as a philosophical meaning for the adjective ἐπιτακτικός. As we have seen, the distinctions between the various kinds of practical knowledge Aristotle mentions in the *Protrepticus* are an elaboration of the distinction between possession and use proposed in the *Euthydemus*, and are probably based on Plato's comparison between the εὐτυχῶν and the craftsman, whose ability does not depend on the possession but the clever use of his tools. In the *Statesman* (260a–b) Plato proposes a different analysis of the types of knowledge, whose influence on Aristotle is quite evident. He distinguishes between a *critical* and a *prescriptive* function of knowledge. The former is the ability to formulate such judgements as those of mathematicians, while the latter is the ability to cause other people to put the content of *krisis* into practice, as is the case of architects, who calculate and, in addition, make sure that the outcome of their calculations is realized:

But it belongs to him, I think, once he has given his professional judgment, not to be finished or to take his leave (ἀπηλλάχθαι), in the way that the expert in calculation took his, but to assign (προσάττειν) whatever is the appropriate task to each group of workers until they complete what has been assigned to them ... So both all sorts of knowledge like this and all those that go along with the art of calculation are theoretical, but these two classes of knowledge differ from each other insofar as one makes judgments, while the other directs? ... So if we divided off two parts of

17 Thuc. I 140, 2, 6; 141, 1, 7 (ἐπιτασσομένη); Xenoph. *Cyr.* II 3, 4; V 3, 50, 1; *Mem.* IV 4, 3, 4; *Hiero.* 9, 3, 2.

18 Cf., in the sense of “command”: Isocr. *Nic.* 13, 6; 51, 1; *Archid.* 7, 5; 8, 2; *Areopag.* 2, 4; 64, 5; *Panath.* 67, 5; 79, 8; in that of “task”: *Antid.* 150, 4; so also Xenoph. *Cyr.* VII 5, 63, 3; and Andoc. *In Alcib.* 42, 3.

19 Cf. *Busir.* 18, 4; *Ad Nic.* 34, 3; *Nic.* 56, 7.

20 *In soph.* 21, 2; *Antid.* 188, 7. See also the passage of *De pace*, 16, 6, where Isocrates, after evoking the peace of Antalcidas, wishes a new peace treaty which, like that, “prescribes that the Greeks are autonomous (συνθήκαις ... προσταττούσαις δὲ τοὺς Ἕλληνας αὐτονόμους εἶναι)”, where the verb has arguably the meaning of “to deliberate”.

theoretical (γνωστική) knowledge as a whole, referring to one as directive and the other as making judgments (τὸ μὲν ἐπιτακτικὸν μέρος, τὸ δὲ κριτικόν), would we say that it had been divided suitably?<sup>21</sup>

Plato's analysis certainly influences Aristotle's view. This is shown by the presence in Plato's text of the adjectives λογιστικός,<sup>22</sup> ἐπιτακτικός, κριτικός, all of which Aristotle uses in his account of deliberation and the functions of the statesman.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Plato introduces three further distinctions within prescriptive activity. These distinctions are extremely important for the later history of the concept of prescription. Firstly, he clarifies the difference between the authority one exerts on behalf of other people and the authority one exerts oneself. As examples, he cites the prescription of a herald and that of a king:

... in which of these two sorts of expertise should we locate the expert in kingship? In the one concerned with making judgments, as if he were some sort of spectator, or shall we rather locate him as belonging to the directive sort of expertise (τῆς ἐπιτακτικῆς ... τέχνης), seeing that he is master of other? ... we should need to look at directive expertise in its turn, to see if it divides somewhere. And to me it seems that it does so somewhere in this direction: in the way that the expertise of the retail-dealer is distinguished from that of the "self-seller" or producer who sells his own products, so the class of kings appears set apart from the class of heralds ... the class of heralds takes over directions that have been thought up by someone else (ἀλλότρια νοήματα), and itself issues them for a second time (ἐπιτάττει πάλιν) to another group.<sup>24</sup>

By distinguishing between those who formulate a prescription after thinking it out, i.e. deliberating it, and those who transmit the prescription, Plato uses the image of the herald to outline a hierarchy of different degrees of authority. The herald is not to be viewed as someone who simply spreads the command, for he also transmits its injunctive value (ἐπιτάττει πάλιν), and represents, in Plato's image, a sort of intermediate degree of authority. This intermediate status is inferior to that of deliberative sovereignty, whose orders he merely

21 Plat. *Pol.* 260a4–b5. See also *Pol.* 261b–c, 263e8–9, and 267a8–9, where Plato speaks of a ἐπιτακτικὸν μέρος as a part of the γνωστικὴ ἐπιστήμη.

22 Cf. *Pol.* 260a10.

23 Cf. Aristot. *Top.* 129a11–13; 145a30; *De an.* 434a7; *Eth. eud.* 1220a9, b5; 1246b23; 1249b14; *Eth. nic.* 1139a12–14; 1143a8–10; a23, a30; *Polit.* 1275b19.

24 Plat. *Pol.* 260c1–d9.

carries out; but superior, because of its prescriptive character, to that of the people who receive the command.

Secondly, in the *Laws* Plato makes an extremely interesting remark on the usefulness of prescriptions that do not coincide with *nomoi* but come as an addition to them and are halfway between the laws and exhortations to abide by them:

The duty laid upon (τὸ προσταττόμενον) the lawgiver probably goes further than the bare task of enacting laws: in addition to laws, there is something else which falls naturally between advice and law—a thing which has often cropped up in the course of our discussion, as, for example, in connection with the nurture of young children: such matters, we say, should not be left unregulated, but it would be most foolish to regard those regulations as enacted laws. When, then, the laws and the whole constitution have been thus written down, our praise of the citizen who is preeminent for virtue will not be complete when we say that the virtuous man is he who is the best servant of the laws and the most obedient; a more complete statement will be this,—that the virtuous man is he who passes through life consistently obeying the written rules of the lawgiver, as given in his legislation, approbation and disapprobation.<sup>25</sup>

There exists an intermediate practice, which teaches citizens not only the content of the general norm, but also the different ways in which the norm must be implemented in life through particular actions. As Plato makes clear, this is the most difficult and important duty, or rather task (τὸ προσταττόμενον), of the good lawgiver, who is not allowed to write a law and then “go away”, i.e. fail to see to its applicability. Plato lays the foundations of the view that prescription is not merely an expression of authority. Generally speaking, he regards prescription as the function of a lawgiver who cares for the education of the citizens, as is shown by the fact that he repeatedly uses the verb *προσάττειν* in the *Republic*<sup>26</sup> to refer to prescriptions given with an educational aim. In addition, as the passages from the *Statesman* and the *Laws* suggest, prescription is the function carried out by those who have to *interpret* the *nomos* and draft the guidelines for the application of the general norm. In this case, prescription reflects the injunctive character of the *nomos*, though not always its generality, since the goal of prescription is often confined to a narrower practical domain

<sup>25</sup> *Leg.* 822d4–e9.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. e.g., *Resp.* 423d9; 453b10; and, above all, 527c1; 527d6; 530c3, etc.

than that of the law. On the other hand, prescription is not just a more specific rule of conduct than the law it refers to; it also requires an assessment of the particular context and situation in which the normative principle contained in the law is to be implemented. The general norm, like the written law, cannot take into account contingent factors, because they are various and changeable. As we have seen,<sup>27</sup> Plato emphasized the limits of written law, which is unable to take into account the variety of particular cases and the perpetual change of the circumstances. In the *Statesman* he gives the examples of the gymnastic master trying to impose the same exercise on many people who do not have the same physical attitudes,<sup>28</sup> and that of medical prescription which, once it is written down, will be unable to take into account the changes in the condition of the patient.<sup>29</sup> As an outcome of his analysis in the *Statesman*, Plato argues for the superiority of the royal science and the wisdom of the ἀνὴρ βασιλικός over the written law: like an ignorant and arrogant man, written law too, if asked a question, will not answer.<sup>30</sup>

The third distinction is put forward in *Leg.* 875d–c: when claiming that it is necessary to entrust the State to written norms Plato once again distinguishes<sup>31</sup> between normative and prescriptive authority, i.e. the authority of the lawgiver, who has to formulate a general norm valid in most cases (ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ); and the authority of the judge (δικαστής), who applies the normative principle to particular cases, which are so numerous (μυρία ἑκάστα, 875e1) that the law is unable take them all into account. This distinction corresponds only in part

<sup>27</sup> See ch. 1, pp. 22–23 and 25.

<sup>28</sup> *Pol.* 294d3–e6.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Pol.* 295b10–296a2; see already 294a7–b6. On Plato's use of the verb ἐπιτάττειν in relation to written laws, see D. El Murr, *Savoir et gouverner. Essai sur la science politique platonicienne*, Vrin, Paris 2014, 236–243.

<sup>30</sup> *Pol.* 294c1–4: “But we see law bending itself more or less toward this very thing: it resembles some self-willed and ignorant person (ἄνθρωπον αὐθάδη καὶ ἀμαθῆ), who allows no one to do anything contrary to what he orders, nor to ask any questions about it, not even if, after all, something new turns out for someone that is better, contrary to the prescription that he himself has laid down”. The image of the ignorant and authoritarian tyrant should not make us forget that the prescriptive defect of written law does not reside in its coercive nature, but in its “fixation”. Once “fixed”, i.e. written down, laws escape the examination of reason, which is to be imagined as an “interrogation” and a dialogue. This recalls partly Socratic inheritance (cf. *Protag.* 329a1–b1: “Suppose you put a question to one of them: they are just like books, incapable of either answering you or putting a question of their own; if you question even a small point in what has been said, just as brazen vessels ring a long time after they have been struck and prolong the note unless you put your hand on them, these orators too, on being asked a little question, extend their speech over a full-length course”), and partly Plato's attitude towards written discourse, cf. *Phaedr.* 275d4–9.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. also 934b–c.

to the one in *Laws* 822d4ff., where Plato assigns the lawgivers the task of formulating the laws and establishing such regulations as make them applicable in every domain of life, i.e. exhortations, praises and blames.<sup>32</sup> These regulations accompanying the *nomoi* are included among the tasks of the lawgivers. By contrast, in *Laws* 875e ff., Plato argues for the distinction between two political functions. Whereas the lawgiver writes the *nomos* and, if necessary, such measures as must accompany the laws, the court and the judge do not perform any normative action, but apply the relevant norm to a certain situation, and in doing so take into account all the particular circumstances the lawgiver cannot consider when writing the law. This distinction allows us to view prescription as a special domain of normative authority. As an application of a general norm to contingent cases, prescription requires the knowledge of empirical and changing reality, i.e. a competence other than the normative and legislative one, but equally necessary.

Aristotle takes over Plato's various distinctions as well as the difference between the normative and prescriptive function. In some passage of his *Politics*, he claims that it is necessary to give specific prescriptions in order to correct the law or even fill a gap in it. For Aristotle as for Plato, the faults of written laws are their universal character,<sup>33</sup> their functioning ἀπλῶς (i.e. without taking into account the particular circumstances and contingent cases that can make for exceptions<sup>34</sup>), and their inability to prescribe ἀκριβῶς,<sup>35</sup> i.e. to give prescriptions adjusting to specific cases. Even the greatest merit of the law, i.e. the fact of its being "dispassionate", which renders it preferable to a government dominated by emotions, can represent a fault, as far as its application to particular cases is concerned. To overcome such a limit, what is needed is the intervention of a good governor, the ἄρχων.<sup>36</sup> All this does not lead Aristotle to prefer the government of the ἄρχων, to whom he only ascribes a subsidiary role which cannot be compared to the prominent part played by Plato's ἀνὴρ βασιλικός.<sup>37</sup> Aristotle claims that written laws are sover-

32 Cf. *Leg.* 822e2–4: "Such matters, we say, should not be left unregulated, but it would be most foolish to regard those regulations as enacted laws".

33 Cfr. *Polit.* 1269a11–12; 1282b5; 1292a32–33.

34 *Polit.* 1268b39–40.

35 Cf. *Polit.* 1269a10–11: ἀδύνατον ἀκριβῶς πάντα γραφῆναι; 1282b5.

36 Cf. *Polit.* 1286a8–25.

37 The question of the preference between the rule of laws and the rule of intelligent and skilled men ("political legalism" vs "political personalism") is now analyzed by Ch. Horn, "Individual Competence and Collective Deliberation in Aristotle's *Politics*", in C. Arruzza-D. Nikulin (eds.), *Philosophy and Political Power in Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden 2016, 94–113. See also S. Gastaldi, "Il re 'signore di tutto': il problema della *pambasileia* nella *Politica* di Ari-



eign<sup>38</sup> because no constitution can work without general and stable principles. He also emphasizes, however, that what is crucial to fill the gaps in written laws is the lawgiver's or governor's critical ability as well as the formation of technical and scientific competencies useful to politics.<sup>39</sup>

### 3 Prescriptive Logos as a Psychic Faculty

In his *Protrepticus* Aristotle argues that philosophy, i.e. the use of reason, is necessary, among other things, because of its importance in action. This depends on the fact that reason can formulate judgements other than assertions to give prescriptions. When clarifying the functions of practical reason Aristotle uses the word *logos* in two main senses. This is evident from *Eth. eud.* 1220a5–11, where he illustrates the psychological basis of the distinction between intellectual and ethical virtues:

Of virtue there are two species, the ethical and the intellectual. For we praise not only the just but also the intelligent and the wise. For we assumed that what is praiseworthy is either the virtue or its work, and these are not activities, but have activities. But since the intellectual virtues involve *logos*, they belong to that rational part of the soul which governs the soul by its possession of *logos*, while the ethical belong to the part which is irrational but by its nature obedient to the part possessing reason.<sup>40</sup>

---

stotele", in S. Gastaldi-J.-F. Pradeau (eds.), *Le philosophe, le roi, le tyran. Études sur les figures royale et tyrannique dans la pensée grecque et sa postérité*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2009, 33–52, and E. Garver, *Aristotle's Politics. Living Well and Living Together*, University Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2011, 98; C.A. Bates Jr., "Law and the Rule of Law and Its Place Relative to *Politeia* in Aristotle's Politics", in L. Huppes Cluysenaer-N.M.M.S. Coelho (eds.), *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Law: Theory, Practice, and Justice*, Springer, Dordrecht 2013, 59–75.

38 *Polit.* 1282b1–3; 1286a22–25. It is worth recalling that in *Eth. nic.* 1180a21–22 Aristotle attributes to laws also the ἀναγκαστική δύναμις, of which master's and father's authorities are devoid. This depends on the fact that political authority is grounded in practical reasoning, being the two others based arguably on traditions and familiar customs.

39 *Polit.* 1282a1 ff., 1299a15 ff.

40 Ἀρετῆς δ' εἶδη δύο, ἡ μὲν ἠθικὴ ἡ δὲ διανοητικὴ. ἐπαινοῦμεν γάρ οὐ μόνον τοὺς δικαίους ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς συνετοὺς καὶ τοὺς σοφοὺς· ἐπαινετὸν γάρ ὑπέκειτο ἡ ἀρετὴ ἢ τὸ ἔργον, ταῦτα δ' οὐκ ἐνεργεῖ, ἀλλ' εἰσὶν αὐτῶν ἐνέργειαι. ἐπεὶ δ' αἱ διανοητικαὶ μετὰ λόγου, αἱ μὲν τοιαῦται τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος, ὃ ἐπιτακτικόν ἐστι τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ λόγον ἔχει, αἱ δ' ἠθικαὶ τοῦ ἀλόγου μὲν, ἀκολουθητικοῦ δὲ κατὰ φύσιν τῷ λόγον ἔχοντι. The expression μετὰ λόγου, "involve *logos*", does not mean

In this passage the term *logos* has two different senses. When he claims that intellectual virtues are μετὰ λόγου, “involve logos”, Aristotle means that these virtues, when concerned with action, are exercised through our ability to reason about a certain course of actions and assess the circumstances in which the actions will have to take place. The ἔργον of these virtues consists not in action, but in a reasoning about actions. The nature of intellectual virtues is *argumentative* and *discursive*, whereas the nature of ethical virtues is *practical*. Being accompanied by *logos* in the sense we have just clarified, intellectual, or dianoetic, virtues belong to the psychic μέρος possessing reason. This μέρος of the soul, therefore, is also ἐπιτακτικός: it rules desire just because its excellence consists in arguing for a demarcation between excess and defect in a given sphere of action. Hence, in the first and third of its occurrences in this passage—i.e. in the expressions μετὰ λόγου and ἡ λόγον ἔχει respectively—the term *logos* means *reasoning* or *argument*, and indicates the ἔργον, the task, of intellectual virtues. In its second and fourth occurrences—i.e. in the expressions τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος and τῷ λόγον ἔχοντι respectively—*logos* is the psychic component, reason. We can assume that the neuter pronoun ὃ in the clause starting with ὃ ἐπιτακτικόν ... refers to an understood term such as μέρος or a similar neuter noun (e.g. γένος), which is also implicitly presupposed by the conclusion τῷ [...] ἔχοντι. From this passage, it is clear then that the adjective ἐπιτακτικός, being an attribute to λόγος in its second occurrence, characterizes reason as a psychic component, not an act of reason such as a law or a rule.

---

that intellectual virtues spring from reason, but that they are expressed through the *logos*, a rational and propositional account, and not through choice and action (as it is the case of practical virtues and, more generally, of moral habit). Wood’s translation of μετὰ λόγου as “having a rational principle”, does not persuade me in that it is not perfectly clear to me what “principle” is. In my opinion, the syntagma μετὰ λόγου, in Aristotle, means more than often “accompanied by discourse/argument”: see *An. post.* 100b10–11, where Aristotle, in order to explain why principles are object not of demonstration but intuition, or understanding (νοῦς), says that all science involve an account, that is, discursive reason, or even argument; cf. also *De int.* 22b39–23a1 and *Rhet.* 1370a19–25. On the issue, see J. Frank, “On *logos* and Politics in Aristotle”, in T. Lockwood-T. Samaras (eds.), *Aristotle’s Politics. A Critical Guide*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, 9–26, who analyzes the various occurrences of *logos* in relevant passages from *Politics* (esp. 1253a8–18) and *Nicomachean Ethics* (1098a4–7, 1102b25–26; 1103a2–3), in order to establish whether Aristotle means *logos* as “reason” or “speech”. On the other hand, the meaning of *logos*, in some ethical and political contexts, as “speech”, is not in contrast with the idea that it is the “argument” or, better, the “explanation”, according to the interpretation offered by J. Moss, “Right Reason in Plato and Aristotle”, cit.

Aristotle refers again to the λόγος ἐπιτακτικός, construed as a psychic component, a few lines lower down, in *Eth. eud.* 1220a38–b6:

Since the character, being as its name indicates something that grows by habit—and that which is under guidance other than innate is trained to a habit by frequent movement of a particular kind—is the active principle present after this process, but in things inanimate we do not see this (for even if you throw a stone upwards ten thousand times, it will never go upwards except by compulsion),—consider, then, character to be this, viz. a quality in accordance with prescriptive *logos* belonging to the irrational part of the soul which is yet able to obey the reason.<sup>41</sup>

Despite some textual difficulties,<sup>42</sup> the general sense of the passage can be summarized as follows. Character is fashioned through activities repeated in time. It is not an innate attitude, but is originated by a principle guiding the soul.<sup>43</sup> It arises in the desiring part of the soul, which is irrational but able to obey reason: the quality of someone's character reveals itself in the quality of their desires. On the other hand, a being that is unable to have desires will acquire no habit and hence no character, as is shown by the example of the stone: as much as it is thrown upward, it will never “get used” to going upward. Character, therefore, is the quality of the desiring soul produced by the ἐπιτακτικός *logos*. Whether this expression here refers just to a psychic component is unclear. Scholars generally take the words κατὰ ἐπιτακτικὸν λόγον to mean “prescriptive principle” or “reason's guideline”.<sup>44</sup> Aristotle's remark that habit is the product of a *frequent* movement in a *particular* direction is worth pausing on. The adverb πολλάκις implies that the desiring soul learns the correct conduct as something that grows ever more familiar. The adverb πώς indicates, in an indefinite way, that it is necessary to direct action towards this or that particular objective for

41 ... ἐστὶ τὸ ἦθος, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα σημαίνει ὅτι ἀπὸ ἔθους ἔχει τὴν ἐπίδοσιν, ἐθίζεται δὲ τὸ ὑπ' ἀγωγῆς μὴ ἐμφύτου τῷ πολλάκις κινεῖσθαι πώς, οὕτως ἤδη τὸ ἐνεργητικόν, ὃ ἐν τοῖς ἀψύχοις οὐχ ὁρώμεν (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν μυριάκις ῥίψῃς ἄνω τὸν λίθον, οὐδέποτε ποιήσει τοῦτο μὴ βίῃ), διὸ ἔστω (τὸ) ἦθος τοῦτο ψυχῆς κατὰ ἐπιτακτικὸν λόγον (τοῦ ἀλόγου μέν), δυναμένου δ' ἀκολουθεῖν τῷ λόγῳ ποιότης.

42 On the difficulties of these lines, see F. Dirlmeier, *Aristoteles. Eudemische Ethik. Übersetzt und kommentiert*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1962, 240; M. Woods, *Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics*, cit., 108; P.L. Donini, *Aristotele. Etica Eudemia. Traduzione, introduzione e note*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2005<sup>2</sup>, 203–204; P.L.P. Simpson, *The Eudemian Ethics of Aristotle*, cit., 26.

43 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1103a19 ff.

44 See Woods (“prescriptive principle”), and Donini (“direttiva della ragione”), Simpson (“reason in command”), etc.

the sake of the one end assumed by volition, for which this or that particular objective represents a preliminary condition. The *indefinite* sense of πῶς plays a key role within Aristotle's theory of deliberation. Practical reason leads the soul in a certain direction not only at the end of deliberative reasoning, i.e. after it has assessed in the light of the circumstances the conditions for the feasibility of this or that action and has come to a choice. It does so at each intermediate phase of deliberative reasoning too, since at each stage of deliberation there can arise different options which have to be assessed in the light of the circumstances. Consequently, we cannot rule out that in this passage the expression λόγος ἐπιτακτικός does not refer to the rational faculty, but rather to discursive reasoning arguing for the preferability of a specific line of conduct.

In a third passage from the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle evokes the double quality, directive and subordinate, of human nature in order to explain the difference between two types of authority, one in accord with nature and absolute, the other functional and prescriptive:

But since the doctor has a limit by reference to which he distinguishes what is healthy for the body from what is not, and with reference to which each thing up to a certain point ought to be done and is healthy,<sup>45</sup> while if less or more is done health is the result no longer, so in regard to actions and choice of what is naturally good but not praiseworthy, the good man should have a limit both of disposition and of choice and avoidance with regard to excess or deficiency of wealth and good fortune, the limit being, as above said, as reason directs; this corresponds to saying in regard to diet that the limit should be as medical science and its reason direct. But this, though true, is not illuminating. One must, then, here and elsewhere, live with reference to the ruling principle and with reference to the formed habit and the activity of the ruling principle, as the slave must live with reference to that of the master, and each of us by the rule proper to him. But since we are by nature composed of a ruling and a subject part, each of us should live according to the governing element within himself—but this is twofold, for medical science governs in one sense, health in another, the former existing for the latter. And so it is with the theoretic faculty; for god is not a prescribing ruler, but is the end with a view to which wisdom prescribes ... What choice, then, or possession of the natural goods—whether bodily goods, wealth, friends, or other things—will most produce the contemplation of god, that choice or possession is best;

45 Reading ὑγιεινόν; Susemihl and Walzer-Mingay read ὑγιαίνον.

this is the noblest limit, but any that through deficiency or excess hinders one from the contemplation and service of god is bad.<sup>46</sup>

The passage focuses on the issue of how to determine a limit for the search and possession of material and social goods on the part of a virtuous person. The general thrust of the argument is that such goods are worth choosing because their possession promotes happiness or makes it possible. And since the highest happiness consists in theoretical activity, the limit for the choice and possession of these goods is determined by the possibility of θεωρεῖν. Within this framework, Aristotle introduces two principles (ἀρχὴ διττή) which are both directive, though in different ways: the first is the end, which does not give prescriptions; the other gives prescriptions for the sake of the end. For example, health is a normative principle because it is the end of medical science, but it is not itself a prescriptive discipline; medicine is a science that gives prescriptions for the sake of health. These two kinds of normativity, one superior and non-prescriptive, the other prescriptive and serving, as it were, the norm that represents the end, are connected by Aristotle with the two functions of human reason. This is what we may conclude if by the term θεός (or θεῖον, on D.B. Robinson's reading, which is followed by Walzer and Mingay<sup>47</sup>) at 1249b17 (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ/θείου θεωρίαν) and 1249b20 (τὸν θεὸν/τὸ θεῖον θεραπεύειν καὶ θεωρεῖν), we take Aristotle to mean not god, but that part of human reason which contemplates true and unchanging objects. "God" or "the divine" would then turn out to be theoretical reason which practical reason serves in order to promote θεωρεῖν by deliberating about natural and material goods and the limits of their possession. Theoretical reason is normative but not prescriptive because, along with its activity, it is the end for the sake of which practical reason gives prescriptions to the desiring soul.

This interpretation, according to which Aristotle here is alluding to the "internal god", i.e. man or man's reason, not a divine being, is in my view the most plausible.<sup>48</sup> Aristotle uses sometimes the image of god to describe the *nous* that thinks "beautiful and divine" objects, i.e. true, eternal and necessary ones. In *Eth. nic.* 1139a8–17, while discussing the difference between theoretical and practical reason, Aristotle distinguishes the two rational faculties on the basis of both their respective objects and the conformity of each faculty with its own content:

46 *Eth. eud.* 1249a21–b23.

47 Aristotelis *Ethica Eudemia*, rec. R.R. Walzer-J.M. Mingay, OCT, Oxford 1991, ad loc.

48 For the reasons in support of this interpretation, see P.L. Donini, *Aristotele. Etica Eudemia*, cit., 224; Id. *Abitudine e saggezza*, cit., 260–263.

Where objects differ in kind the part of the soul answering to each of the two is different in kind, since it is in virtue of a certain likeness and kinship with their objects that they have the knowledge they have. Let one of these parts be called the scientific and the other the calculative ... we must, then, learn what is the best state of each of these two parts; for this is the virtue of each.

This passage helps us understand the *Eudemian Ethics* passage about the ἀρχὴ διττῇ. Aristotle is claiming that the two capacities of reason are of different kinds, given the different ontological status of their respective objects. This does not mean that the two rational capacities are ontologically different, but that they are different from the point of view of their respective procedures of reasoning, which have to be consistent with the nature of the objects of knowledge. On the one side, the eternal objects are the domain of scientific knowledge and theoretical reason. On the other side, mutable objects are the domain of calculative reason, which develops arguments in order to act on reality and, at least to some extent, modify it (attaining an end and realizing a purpose are ways of modifying reality). This prerogative does not belong to theoretical reason, for its domain admits of no changes. Theoretical reason is normative both because it can think true objects, thus providing the standard of truth which practical reason must also refer to; and, most importantly, because its objects can also represent a practical goal: θεωρεῖν itself is the highest activity human beings can *choose* to perform, and is conducive to true happiness. We may conclude that theoretical reason has no deliberative or prescriptive capacity, nor, obviously, does it need it to think true and eternal objects and things that happen either always or most of the time.

Besides, deliberative reason gives prescriptions to satisfy human needs and desires, as well as to make possible the realization of the task of theoretical reason. Two passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are generally quoted in support of the interpretation that the “god” in *Eth. eud.* 1249b17 and b20 refers to theoretical reason or intellect, rather than a divine being:

If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be intellect or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be complete happiness ... this activity is the best (since not only is intellect the best thing in us, but the objects of intellect are

the best of knowable objects); and, secondly, it is the most continuous, since we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can do anything.<sup>49</sup>

The final remark, i.e. that theoretical activity is performed more continuously (συνεχεστάτη, συνεχῶς) than any other practical activity, is significant. It does not literally mean that human and individual θεωρεῖν never ceases or is never interrupted; it means that there are no motives to interrupt, or deviate, the train of theoretical thought about true, eternal, and necessary objects. The objects of practical reason may be objects of volition and remote ends. As *remote* ends they become objects of deliberation. That deliberative reason is discontinuous is not a fault; it is discontinuous because it directs action towards an object of desire which, once achieved, is not an object of deliberation any longer, since it is not actually desired any longer (although it can remain desirable). Therefore, it is actual desire that, once satisfied, does not impose itself on the deliberative faculty. The case of prescription is different if, as we have suggested, prescription is the conclusion of a deliberation originated by a just potentially desirable object. In this case, the premise, or starting point, is more a normative opinion with which we agree, than the satisfaction of a desire, or a need. The true goal of deliberation is to formulate a rule of conduct, which will be implemented only *if need be*, i.e. if a desire arises for the object the rule refers to. There may be, in this case, a continuity of reasoning about a practical object, but it rather concerns the truth of the prescriptive proposition, the rule ("it is always true that a certain problem is solved in a certain way", "it is always true that this need must be satisfied in this way"). Besides, such a continuity lasts as long as the rule retains its effectiveness.

After having made it clear, in *Eth. nic.* 1178a23–25, that the exercise of intellectual virtue needs material goods only to a small extent, or at least to a smaller extent than the exercise of ethical virtue,<sup>50</sup> Aristotle emphasizes, in 1178b8–32, the superiority of θεωρεῖν by pointing out that it is most similar to the one activ-

49 *Eth. nic.* 1177a11–22: Εἰ δ' ἐστὶν ἡ εὐδαιμονία κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, εὐλογον κατὰ τὴν κρατίστην αὕτη δ' ἂν εἴη τοῦ ἀρίστου. εἴτε δὴ νοῦς τοῦτο εἴτε ἄλλο τι, ὃ δὴ κατὰ φύσιν δοκεῖ ἄρχειν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ ἔννοιαν ἔχειν περὶ καλῶν καὶ θείων, εἴτε θεῖον ὃν καὶ αὐτὸ εἴτε τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ θεϊότατον, ἡ τοῦτου ἐνέργεια κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν εἴη ἂν ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία. ὅτι δ' ἐστὶ θεωρητικὴ, εἴρηται ... κρατίστη τε γὰρ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνέργεια (καὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ τῶν γνωστών, περὶ ἃ ὁ νοῦς)· ἔτι δὲ συνεχεστάτη· θεωρεῖν [τε] γὰρ δυνάμεθα συνεχῶς μᾶλλον ἢ πράττειν ὁμοῦν.

50 This remark is in accord with the context of the *Eudemian Ethics* (1249a21–b23) where Aristotle argues that the realization of intellectual virtue and of the exercise of θεωρεῖν represents the limit that enables us to understand to what extent we must pursue the material goods.

ity we can attribute to the gods, and then concludes by stressing the natural kinship between human *nous* and the divine nature (1179a22–27):

... he who exercises his intellect and cultivates it seems to be both in the best state and most dear to the gods. For if the gods have any care for human affairs, as they are thought to have, it would be reasonable that they should delight in that which was best and most *akin* to them (i.e. intellect) ...

These passages provide the context that allows us to understand why Aristotle calls theoretical reason *θεός* (or *θεῖον*) and why only practical reason is endowed with a prescriptive capacity. Practical reason is exercised in order to attain concrete objectives corresponding to various kinds of needs; however, it is also necessary for achieving what is the highest good for human beings, i.e. theoretical activity. Since human beings must satisfy their natural and material needs, in doing so they will have to be careful to preserve their possibility of *theorein*, i.e. avoid pursuing superfluous goods and never lack what is necessary. Aristotle's claim, at *Eth. eud.* 1249b16, that "god" gives no orders because it does not need anything (which is routinely adduced to disprove this interpretation), can be accounted for with reference to the nature of theoretical reason. For if considered as separate from the human compound in which it is present, theoretical reason does not need anything and has just to *ἐνεργεῖν*, i.e. think. Human beings, on the contrary, need some minimal material condition to enable them to devote themselves to thinking. This relationship between the two forms of reason highlights the function that deliberative reason has to perform "in the service of" reason. This function is the same as the one that, as we will see, characterizes *phronesis*; it allows us to establish a link between the λόγος ἐπιτακτικός and the ὑψηροῦσαι sciences of fr. 4 Ross of the *Protrepticus*.

The Aristotelian passages just discussed are important for two further reasons. The first is that, even if we admit that happiness for human beings lies in theoretical activity and contemplative life, when we choose to devote ourselves to theoretical activity we make a *practical* and *deliberate* choice. This depends on the fact that we make a deliberate choice through an actual desire. Consequently, theoretical life is itself an object of desire. We may add that it is so in a derivative and instrumental sense, since we choose it as a means to achieve happiness. (That theoretical activity is the same as happiness, by contrast, depends on it being a way of life that makes us immediately happy, and happiness is the inherent end of an action, not a product of it. Nonetheless, from the point of view of the logic of our deliberation, we choose to devote ourselves to contemplation *in order to* be happy, i.e. we choose a means to an end.)



The second reason why the passages we have discussed in this paragraph are significant is the relationship between what is *normative* and what is *prescriptive*. Until now, the notions of *normative* and *prescriptive* have never been clearly distinguished; Aristotle apparently associated them in the term *epitaktikos*. After dealing with the notion of “double principle” (ἀρχὴ διττή), however, we can safely take Aristotle as thinking that the end for the sake of which we perform certain actions is normative; the actions are prescribed with reference to a norm we want to adjust our life to. If this is correct, then we have to regard *normative* and *prescriptive* as two contiguous concepts, and at the same time, as distinct from the point of view of the logic of deliberation, since the end for the sake of which we deliberate (e.g. to be happy) is *normative*; the “means”, i.e. the kind of conduct we adopt to attain the end (e.g. contemplation) is *prescriptive*.

#### 4 The Argumentative and Discursive Nature of Prescriptive Logos

In *Eth. eud.* 1220a5–11 Aristotle explains that intellectual virtues belong to reason, not the desiring soul; in this, they differ from ethical virtues. As we said at the beginning of the previous paragraph, in this *Eudemian* text, the term λόγος has two senses. In the expression μετὰ λόγου it refers not to the rational psychic faculty, but the reasoning in which the activity of intellectual virtues, and mostly practical wisdom, consists. This reasoning, which is deliberation or calculation, may be also called “prescriptive *logos*”,<sup>51</sup> firstly because it is the reasoning by which practical reason prescribes to the desiring soul; and, secondly, because deliberative reason can formulate a discourse by which a deliberator guides the conduct of other people. So, any command, practical and technical rule, political law, or even exhortation, is a particular prescriptive discourse that either issues a command; or prescribes what to do or not to do under given circumstances; or explains, in addition to the formulation of the rule, the law, etc., also *why* a line of conduct is to be adopted. The explanation may be both of the end of the prescribed conduct, as in the case of Plato’s preambles; and of the material and efficient causes which link the prescribed action to the end, as in the case of deliberation as well as scientific and technical teaching.

Practical wisdom, which is the most important dianoetic virtue with a peculiar prescriptive character,<sup>52</sup> turns out to have an argumentative and discursive

<sup>51</sup> See *Eth. eud.* 1220a9–10, b5.

<sup>52</sup> See *Eth. eud.* 1249b14; *Eth. nic.* 1143a7–8.

nature. By “argumentative” and “discursive”, I am referring to two distinct functions. Wise people have the ability to argue because they can find, through deliberative reasoning, the solution to a problem about an end or a desirable object, and they can also argue for the choice they have made themselves or the prescription they have given to someone else. In other words, they can adduce a good reason to prefer a certain line of conduct to others that seem to be equally effective. The ability to argue and to account for a practical choice or a rule depends on the knowledge of the causes. It is important to emphasize once again that this knowledge is not just the indication of the end. On the contrary, explaining the reason for a choice or a prescription or a rule of conduct means, in many cases, clarifying the material and efficient causes that connect the chosen or prescribed action with the purpose we want to achieve, i.e. the end. Of course, this also holds for all the intermediate stages of the deliberative process, each of which can be accounted for by claiming it is a material condition or an efficient principle of the next stage. In this kind of explanation, which follows the backwards movement of deliberative reasoning, the end, the final cause, is already known. And equally known is the form, i.e. the idea corresponding to the end and providing the inspiration for the action or the rule (e.g. the idea of health is the form, i.e. the notion, that doctors have in their mind when they deliberate about a certain therapy). In the course of the deliberative process, therefore, wise people have to be able to find out the material and efficient causes of the end (doctors will establish that bodily heat is the material cause of the recovery of the balance of humours, and body massage the efficient cause of the recovery of bodily heat).

Final and formal causes are invoked to account for a prescribed conduct, when both the utility of the prescribed conduct and the general normative principle that inspired it are unclear. Answering the question *to what end?* amounts to explaining what is unknown and not immediately evident. When the ultimate end that provided the starting-point for deliberation is known, those who choose to perform or who prescribe a certain action adduce the material or efficient causes justifying their preference of a practical option over other options. (Why do you choose to take that way, rather than another, to get to that place? Why does the road map suggest that we should take that way? Because it is quicker/safer/more panoramic, etc.) If the ultimate end that provided the starting-point for deliberation is unknown, those who chose or prescribed a certain action adduce their end, thus revealing their purpose (the “form” in their mind). In all such cases, i.e. those where the material and efficient causes are explained and those where the end and the form are explained, practical wisdom enables the deliberating subjects to argue for the choice they made or the prescription they gave. Particularly in the second case, i.e. that

of prescription, the ability to argue for a specific practical option reveals the knowledge of the causes, and hence a higher degree of authority.

Aristotle makes an important point about the ability to adduce final and formal causes, claiming that a deliberation has to be a *good* deliberation. This means it has to be a kind of reasoning which, if converted into a deduction, will reveal the moral quality of the middle term and, therefore, the quality of the real end for the sake of which a certain action has been performed:

There being more than one kind of correctness, plainly excellence in deliberation is not any and every kind; for incontinent people and bad people will reach as a result of their calculation what they set themselves to do, so that they will have deliberated correctly, but they will have got a great evil. Now to have deliberated well is thought to be a good thing; for it is this kind of correctness of deliberation that is excellence in deliberation, viz. that which tends to attain what is good. But it is possible to attain even good by a false deduction and to attain what one ought to do but not by the right reason, the middle term being false; so that this too is not yet excellence in deliberation—this state in virtue of which one attains what one ought but not by the right means.<sup>53</sup>

A good deliberation is a wise deliberation that differs from sagacious and effective deliberation, i.e. the one that only identifies the most effective means to achieve the desired end. It also differs from the deliberation choosing to perform advisable and even virtuous actions *but not for the right reason*. It might seem that good deliberation, according to Aristotle, is the reasoning that reflects on the good means to a good end, whereas a deliberation is not good if it concludes with such means as are not good in themselves (actions which are in themselves reprehensible, e.g. lying), though with a view to a good end. In other words, Aristotle would seem to hold that the end does not justify the means. Yet this is not the case, and what Aristotle means is something quite different. He claims that deliberation is not correct just because the reasoning behind it is valid, since the reasoning of vicious or incontinent people is valid too. Vicious people deliberate a bad choice for the sake of a bad end, though in

53 *Eth. nic.* 1142b17–26: ἐπεὶ δ' ἡ ὀρθότης πλεοναχῶς, δῆλον ὅτι οὐ πᾶσα· ὁ γὰρ ἀκρατής καὶ ὁ φαῦλος προτίθεται ἰδεῖν ἕκ τοῦ λογισμοῦ τεύξεσθαι, ὥστε ὀρθῶς ἔσται βεβουλευμένος, κακὸν δὲ μέγα εἰληφώς. δοκεῖ δ' ἀγαθὸν τι τὸ εὖ βεβουλευσθαι· ἡ γὰρ τοιαύτη ὀρθότης βουλῆς εὐβουλία, ἢ ἀγαθοῦ τευκτική. ἀλλ' ἔστι καὶ τοῦτου ψευδεῖ συλλογισμῷ τυχεῖν, καὶ ὁ μὲν δεῖ ποιῆσαι τυχεῖν, δι' οὗ δ' οὐ, ἀλλὰ ψευδῇ τὸν μέσον ὅρον εἶναι· ὥστ' οὐδ' αὐτῇ πω εὐβουλία, καθ' ἣν οὐ δεῖ μὲν τυγχάνει, οὐ μέντοι δι' οὗ ἔδει.

a formally valid way. Incontinent people deliberate a good choice for the sake of a good end, but nonetheless they fail to act in accord with their deliberation because of their weakness. A correct deliberation has to be both valid and good, i.e. it must have a good end as its starting-point; besides, it concludes with the means to an end for a right reason, not a *false one*, i.e. not in an accidental way.<sup>54</sup> The words ψευδῇ τὸν μέσον ὅρον, at 1142b24, do not refer to the means, i.e. the action by which we expect to achieve the end. The term μέσον only indicates the middle term of a syllogism into which a good deliberation can be converted.<sup>55</sup> For a good deliberation will prove to be good if it shows that there is a (material or efficient) cause by which a certain action is to be performed for the sake of a good end. That the term μέσον does not refer to the means to an end can be inferred from the fact that the means to an end, i.e. the object of choice, is qualified as *good* and *worth pursuing* at respectively 1142b21–22 (ὁρθότης βουλήs = ἀγαθοῦ τευκτική) and 1142b23 (ὃ δεῖ ποιῆσαι). Both the ἀγαθόν of the clause

54 See *An. pr.* 53b8–10: “A true conclusion may be drawn from false premises, true however only in respect to the fact, not to the reason (πλὴν οὐ διότι ἀλλ’ ὅτι). The reason cannot be established from false premises”; 57a36–b4: “It is clear then that if the conclusion is false, the premises of the argument must be false, either all or some of them; but when the conclusion is true, it is not necessary that the premises should be true, either one or all, yet it is possible, though no part of the deduction is true, that the conclusion may none the less be true; but not necessarily (οὐ μὴν ἐξ ἀνάγκης). The reason is that when two things are so related to one another, that if the one is, the other necessarily is, then if the latter is not, the former will not be either, but if the latter is, it is not necessary that the former should be. But it is impossible that the same thing should be necessitated by the being and by the not-being of the same thing”. What Aristotle is thinking of, at *Eth. nic.* 1142b17–26, is that the goodness of a choice, or of a prescription, may be somehow deduced from practical premises in a causal and necessary way, if the prescriptive conclusion (“this particular thing is worth of pursuing”) is true *because* both the major, normative, premise, and the minor, assertive, premise are true.

55 This is true also when we consider that, while converting a deliberative reasoning into a series of syllogisms, what plays the role of the middle term in a certain phase of the reasoning is the minor term of a previous phase of the same reasoning. For instance, the following deliberative reasoning is formulated as a hypothetical reasoning: “In order to re-establish health, it is necessary to recover the balance of bodily humors; in order to recover this balance, it is necessary to raise the temperature of body; in order to raise the temperature of body, the best thing is massage; then massage is the first means to the end and the first act to perform.” This sequence can be converted into the following syllogism: “health is a good and is worth pursuing; the balance of bodily humors is healthy; temperature rise produces such a balance; massage produces temperature rise; therefore massage is good and worth pursuing.” In this sequence, the minor term of a single syllogism, i.e. something to be pursued or performed, may also function as a middle term for the subsequent single syllogism. Nonetheless, when Aristotle says μέσον, he refers to a certain cause by which *another* thing is effective to achieve the end.

ἀγαθοῦ τευκτική and ὁ δεῖ ποιῆσαι are also object of the verb τυγχάνειν, because they indicate something good that has been “attained” through reasoning; but in the second case, ὁ δεῖ ποιῆσαι, “what one ought”, has been deduced accidentally, through a false middle term.

Aristotle is not claiming that the end does not justify the means. He does not seem to consider at all the possibility that we attain a good end through a bad means. Whatever its apparent quality, the chosen action is good if performed for the sake of a good end, as the amputation of a limb is good if performed for the sake of the patient’s health. For Aristotle the quality of the chosen action, i.e. of the means, is closely linked with that of the end. This view is borne out by the structure of syllogistic deduction: if we assume the premise containing the standard major extreme, as mentioned at *Eth. nic.* 1144a32–33 “the end and the best” (τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ ἄριστον), and make a valid deduction, we will always have to draw a conclusion that predicates “the end and the best” of the minor extreme. That the amputation of a limb is a good therapeutic means, in order to recover health and even to save the life, is no self-evident or common-sense conclusion. Rather, it is the outcome of a deduction in which the goodness of the end (the major term) is transferred to the means (the minor) for a right reason.

The issue raised by Aristotle at 1142b17–26 concerns the truth of the middle term (or the middle terms) linking the premise with the choice. A good deliberation allows us to achieve, τυγχάνειν, a good through one or more *good* middle terms. Let us suppose we assume happiness as “the end and the best”, and deliberate about the means to attain happiness; let us suppose we convert such a deliberation into a syllogism, where the predicate “conducive to happiness” is predicated of an apparently good and advisable act, e.g. kindness to friends, which would then turn out to be the good means to a good end. Let us suppose kindness to friends has been considered conducive to happiness through a questionable middle term, e.g. the opportunity to gain our friends’ trust in order to get to some advantage, which will enable us to attain happiness. If such a middle term were not seen as morally good, it would “interrupt” the transition of the goodness from the major to the minor extreme, and kindness to friends would result a good and advisable conduct, but accidentally. In Aristotle’s view, the mistake lies in the fact that we would adopt a good means (kindness) to a good ultimate end (happiness) but not for the right reason. Moreover, middle terms can be “false” not because they are wicked or morally questionable, but just because they are errors of perception or opinion. This would be the case when, in order to eat healthy food, we ate chicken meat in the belief that it is rich in vitamins, or would rescue a man in danger because we have mistaken him for our own brother. In such cases, the conclusion seems to be a

good practical choice (we eat healthy food or rescue a man in danger). In none of them, however, is the goodness of the choice inferred from the premises; it is merely accidental. The discussion of εὐβουλία confirms both the “advantage” of the conversion of deliberation into a syllogism and the importance of the knowledge of the causes in the domain of choice and prescription. Herein lies the argumentative nature of practical wisdom, i.e. in the ability to know and adduce the good reasons for a deliberate choice and, even more, a prescription.

When I speak of the *discursive* nature of practical wisdom I mean that it can deduce particular rules from general norms. Although it does not do so with the same degree of necessity as demonstration, it guarantees a certain stability (we follow a certain prescription, a rule of conduct, when we know it is effective not just now, but also in the future and at least in the majority of similar cases). At the same time, the discursive, non-demonstrative, nature of practical wisdom guarantees the flexibility of the rules and hence the possibility of adjusting the same rule to cases which are not entirely similar (e.g. of adjusting the rules of kindness to the social status and age of our interlocutor) or even of suspending the application of a rule without breaching it (e.g. breaking the silence in a concert hall or a library in order to make a vital announcement). The cases of flexibility of prescribed rules are rather frequent in Aristotle,<sup>56</sup> and have been used to support the view that his ethics is particularistic. Yet Aristotle is not in my opinion a “particularist”, even if some of his claims could lead one to think so. On the contrary, he occasionally refers to some categories that, in addition to their function as genera of predication, seem to play the role of criteria for guiding action.<sup>57</sup> This is no surprise, since for Aristotle categories not only are the most general predications irreducible to one another, but also have the form of questions (*when? how much? where?* etc.). Therefore, they represent the fundamental questions we must answer to be able to adjust a moderately stable and constant rule to different circumstances. The answer to one or more of the questions raised by categories, in the practical field, is also a precise and detailed prescription (what shall we do in this kind of situation, or how shall we apply this or that rule here and now? how much money shall we donate, to

56 See *Eth. eud.* 1231b13–15; 17–19; 1233b1–7; 1233b37–38; *Polit.* 1306b10; for general claims about the variability of circumstances and, hence, types of conduct, see *Eth. nic.* 1104a7–9: “the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation”; and 1110a13–14: “such actions are mixed but are more likely voluntary actions; for they are worthy of choice at the time when they are done, and the end of an action is relative to the occasion (τὸ δὲ τέλος τῆς πράξεως κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν ἐστίν)”.

57 See *Eth. eud.* 1217b26–42, *Eth. nic.* 1096a19–34; *Top.* 107a5–12, *Rhet.* 1385a16–b7.

whom, and when?). The possibility of applying these criteria taken from Aristotle's theory of categories makes the rules flexible while preserving their stability and constancy. The adaptability of a rule to different cases is at variance with particularism.

## 5 The Prescriptive Function of Practical Wisdom

Practical wisdom differs from the other intellectual virtues in that it can prescribe conduct. This is why for Aristotle it plays a crucial role in the political domain: practical wisdom is a guiding practical science, but it is also auxiliary, since it gives prescriptions for the sake of ends that are foreign to it. More precisely, practical wisdom plays an auxiliary part "in the service of" wisdom (σοφία) and politics,<sup>58</sup> which are therefore architectonic with respect to practical wisdom. It is unclear whether the sense of "architectonic" is the same as that of "most authoritative" (ἡγεμονικώτεραι) in fr. 4 Ross of the *Protrepticus* as cited above.<sup>59</sup> The latter expression referred to ἐπιστήμαι: the most authoritative sciences are those that use other sciences because they know the end for the sake of which auxiliary sciences are useful. Although this view may be considered as the origin of Aristotle's concept of an architectonic science, I believe there is a slight difference between what he claims in the *Protrepticus* and what he argues in a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we will soon discuss. The difference is the following: the expression "more authoritative" (ἡγεμονικώτερος) evokes a hierarchy within the system of the sciences, i.e. the different kinds of knowledge, whereas the term "architectonic" refers to a hierarchy of the system of the sciences, but also, and particularly, of the activities and their ends. This means that a science is more authoritative than the sciences it uses for the sake of a higher end. An authoritative science within the system of knowledge, however, is not necessarily equally architectonic within the system of actions, for the architectonic status depends on the universality of the end of a certain activity. Consequently, if the good of the State is the highest end, politics, which is a science as well as an activity, will be architectonic. From the point of view of the system of actions, practical wisdom is authoritative in that it is prescriptive, but it is not architectonic, since the highest end of human life does not seem to coincide with being wise, nor with the act of prescribing. Aristotle often claims that wise men's judgement is a sort of paradigm for other people;

<sup>58</sup> See *Eth. eud.* 1218b14–15; *Eth. nic.* 1141b24–17.

<sup>59</sup> See *supra*, p. 165.

besides, they counsel and exhort kings and rulers, and can prescribe what they should do.<sup>60</sup> It is then authoritative also with respect to political affairs, but it is not more authoritative than politics: quite the contrary, it is a science “in the service of” political activity. As we shall see, practical wisdom gives rise to four aporiae that are discussed in the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and concern the relationship of practical wisdom with theoretical wisdom on the one hand, and ethical virtue on the other. We may already suggest that a possible solution of the aporiae lies in the following hypothesis: Aristotle intends to distinguish, within certain limits, the hierarchy of sciences from the hierarchy of actions. Thus those who possess a high degree of practical wisdom, e.g. specialists of political, economic or military affairs, are authoritative when it comes to deciding what is or is not to be done, because they know better. But the specific task of wise men, i.e. the *ἔργον* of practical wisdom, is not architectonic and the act itself of prescribing is performed with a view to a further and higher end, i.e. the good of the State. Practical wisdom is, to a certain extent, an auxiliary (ὕπηρετική) discipline, an intellectual ability at the service of politics.

In *Eth. nic.* 1141b15 ff. Aristotle claims that practical wisdom is about particulars. The great significance of the practical knowledge of particulars requires that an order of priorities should be established:

Here too there must be an architectonic kind of science. Political art and practical wisdom are the same habit, but their essence is not the same. Of political art one part is legislative in that it is architectonic, the other is called by the general name ‘politics’ because it is related to particulars. This has to do with action and deliberation, for a decree is a thing to be carried out as the ultimate term (τὸ ἔσχατον). This is why the exponents of this art are alone said to take part in politics; for these alone do things as manual labourers do things.<sup>61</sup>

This passage comes after the celebrated remark that practical wisdom has to know particulars too, if it is to achieve practical results. It seems that those who

60 See, e.g., *Eth. eud.* 1232a36–37; b5–6; *Eth. nic.* 1107a1; 1140a24–26: “Regarding practical wisdom we shall get at the truth by considering who are the persons we credit with it”.

61 *Eth. nic.* 1141b22–29: εἴη δ’ ἂν τις καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἀρχιτεκτονική. Ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἡ πολιτικὴ καὶ ἡ φρόνησις ἡ αὐτὴ μὲν ἕξις, τὸ μέντοι εἶναι οὐ ταὐτὸν αὐταῖς. τῆς δὲ περὶ πόλιν ἡ μὲν ὡς ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ φρόνησις νομοθετικὴ, ἡ δὲ ὡς τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα τὸ κοινὸν ἔχει ὄνομα, πολιτικὴ· αὕτη δὲ πρακτικὴ καὶ βουλευτικὴ· τὸ γὰρ ψήφισμα πρακτὸν ὡς τὸ ἔσχατον. διὸ πολιτεύεσθαι τούτους μόνον λέγουσιν· μόνοι γὰρ πράττουσιν οὗτοι ὥσπερ οἱ χειροτέχναι.



know what to do because they possess the experience of particulars appear more useful than those who possess universal knowledge without experience of particulars. It is better to know that chicken meat is healthy, than know that light meat is healthy, without knowing what particular kinds of meat are light.<sup>62</sup> As regards political affairs, however, we have to establish an order of priorities and identify an architectonic knowledge, since—as Aristotle is probably implying—the State cannot be entrusted to the mere experience of particulars, mainly because the νόμοι, despite their prescriptive limits resulting from their universality, remain κύριοι, sovereign. Hence, it is no coincidence that Aristotle views νομοθετική science as the higher part of political art, whereas the “inferior” part, i.e. the one subordinate to legislative science, resembles the activity of manual workers (χειροτέχναι) with respect to the project they carry out.

The quoted text is controversial.<sup>63</sup> The main problem is about the reference of the term πολιτική in 1141b23. If we assume that Aristotle is implicitly adopting the Platonic formula τέχνη πολιτική,<sup>64</sup> this passage claims that political art can be legislative or deliberative, the latter concerning the application of laws to particular cases, and the former being *architectonic*. Aristotle introduced the notion of architectonic science or art at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. At 1094a15–16 he argues that when several actions (πράξεις) are linked with one another because they all contribute to the exercise of a single art, some of them are architectonic with respect to others insofar as their end is the end for the sake of which subordinate ends are pursued. Shortly after, he adds:

We must try, in outline at least, to determine what it (*scil.* the end) is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. It would seem to belong to the most authoritative and architectonic one. And politics appears to be of this nature; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them (ποίας ἐκάστους μανθάνειν καὶ μέχρι τίνος); and we see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, e.g. strategy, economics, rhetoric; now, since politics *uses*

62 1141b18–21.

63 Cf. E. Berti, “*Phronesis et science politique*”, cit., 439; C. Natali, *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, cit. 130 and 218; P. Rodrigo, “Aristote et le savoir politique. La question de l’architectonique (*Éthique à Nicomaque*, 1, 1)”, in G. Romeyer Dherbey-G. Aubry (eds.), *L’excellence de la vie*, cit., 15–37; Rodrigo greatly reduces the alleged superiority of politics, thinking that Aristotle is simply using an *endoxon* widespread in rhetoric and philosophy since the 5th century.

64 See Plat. *Protag.* 319a4, 322b5, *Gorg.* 521d7, *Euthyd.* 291c5–6, *Pol.* 276c7, e12, 280a1, etc.

the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man.<sup>65</sup>

This passage contains information we have already found in fr. 4 Ross of the *Protrepticus*,<sup>66</sup> where a distinction is made between productive and auxiliary sciences prescriptive ones. While commenting on this fragment, we recalled<sup>67</sup> that some editors of the *Protrepticus* accept the correction from feminine to neuter of the pronoun governed by the verb “use” (χρῶμεναι); on this reading, Aristotle means that what prescriptive sciences use is not productive sciences, as the transmitted text would suggest, but their products. As we observed, this correction, though plausible, is unnecessary, since prescriptive sciences, being able to make use of products, must also be able to make use of the sciences and arts that produce them, just as, for instance, people who are able to ride a horse know where to buy a good harness and do not produce it themselves. The passage just cited from the *Nicomachean Ethics* accounts for the transmitted text of fr. 4 of *Protrepticus*, as is clear from the clause at 1094b4: χρωμένης δὲ ταύτης (*scil.* political science) ταῖς λοιπαῖς τῶν ἐπιστημῶν.

The terms *architectonic* and *prescriptive*, however, correspond to each other only in part. As we have already suggested, a practical science can prescribe actions for the sake of an end that is different not only from the performance of the prescribed action, but also from the proper good, or end, of those who gave the prescription. While the master of the household and head of the family gives orders to his servants to achieve what is good for himself and his *oikos*, the doctor prescribes a therapy to bring about the recovery of someone else. Medical science is prescriptive, though not in the same way as the management of a household; it uses different arts, e.g. surgery and pharmacology, over which it exerts its authority. But it is architectonic only with respect to the ends of the arts and sciences it uses, not the ultimate end it pursues, i.e. health. The fact that the concepts of “architectonic” and “prescriptive” do not have the same meaning depends on the way Aristotle describes the prescriptive function of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom gives prescriptions, which means it is a form of knowledge endowed with authority; however, it gives prescriptions to

65 *Eth. nic.* 1094a25–b7.

66 Cf. M.R. Johnson, “Aristotle’s Architectonic Sciences”, in D. Ebrey (ed.), *Theory and Practice in Aristotle’s Natural Science*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, 163–186, esp. 170, who, more generally, argues that there is a close relationship also between *Protrepticus* and *Politics* regarding the superiority of theoretical science on practical sciences (including politics).

67 See pp. 164–165.

attain ends that are set by either politics (the good of the State) or theoretical wisdom (meant as the intellectual virtue that can provide moral norms), or the ideal of a theoretical life (which Aristotle characterizes as the happiest kind of life and for whose attainment practical wisdom prescribes the achievement of such material goods as are necessary to devote oneself to θεωρεῖν). Politics, theoretical wisdom, and the theoretical life in a sense are all superior to practical wisdom, and none of them is directly prescriptive. The prescriptive function of *phronesis* does not reside in setting a higher and more universal end than those set by other forms of practical knowledge, but in understanding the orderly nature of things and the hierarchy it is necessary to establish between the universal and the particular. Wise people are not only virtuous people, but also those who know how to achieve practical results in accord with the habit of virtue. Being wise then amounts to knowing how to reason in a deliberative, i.e. hypothetico-problematic way, starting from normative principles possessing those characters of moral goodness and beauty that must be transferred to the particular case.

The second passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* explicitly defining practical wisdom as a prescriptive discipline is 1143a7–16. In it Aristotle distinguishes wisdom from understanding:

Understanding (σύνεσις) and practical wisdom are not the same. For practical wisdom prescribes, since its end is what ought to be done or not to be done; but understanding only judges ... understanding is neither the having nor the acquiring of practical wisdom; but as learning is called understanding when it means the exercise of the faculty of knowledge (ὅταν χρήται τῇ ἐπιστήμῃ), so understanding is applicable to the exercise of the faculty of opinion (χρήσθαι τῇ δόξῃ) for the purpose of judging of what *someone else says* (ἄλλου λέγοντος) about matters with which practical wisdom is concerned, and of judging soundly ...

Understanding is an intellectual virtue whose contribution to human action is basically critical: in a sense, it is also a kind of assessment. Its object is what we deliberate about. Deliberating subjects search for the way to attain an end on the basis of the situational context they are in, and of their knowledge of efficient and material causes. But understanding is not the same as the knowledge of causes or as theoretical wisdom: it is the ability to identify, among the means to attain an end, the most suited to the context the deliberating subject is in, or will probably be in at the time of acting. The evaluative and selective operation of understanding is performed with a view to the prescriptive task of practical wisdom, thus helping to set a rule of conduct. Understanding gives

no prescriptions since it does not tell us what to do; it simply shows one way, among the many, to the solution of a problem.

If we admit, as I think we should, that deliberative reasoning can be converted into a syllogism, then we should probably view the minor premise as the contribution that understanding gives to deliberation (the minor premise being the proposition asserting the existence of something—the minor extreme—that is worth pursuing because of the middle term). To take up some well-known Aristotelian examples, we may affirm that understanding is the critical ability to identify an after-lunch walk or the consumption of chicken meat as two ways, among the many, to preserve health in different situations but for the same efficient cause (both the after-lunch walk and the consumption of chicken meat bring about a good digestion, which is a necessary condition for health). The appropriateness, the suitability—in a sense, the preferability—of the after-lunch walk and the consumption of chicken meat are sanctioned by practical wisdom, which regards these actions not as good as episodic actions, but as good practices or rules of conduct. This is why practical wisdom gives prescriptions, whereas understanding does not.

In the second part of the last text quoted, we find two further significant elements. The first is the view that when we exercise some intellectual virtues, we “make use” of science or opinion. When we have to learn (*μανθάνειν*), we turn to science; when we have to judge the things that are a matter of prescription for wisdom, we turn to opinion. This remark confirms once again the distinction between auxiliary and prescriptive arts and sciences, with the latter using the former. It is quite clear, however, that for Aristotle not every science is only auxiliary or only prescriptive, since a single science can be both superior to some forms of knowledge and auxiliary with respect to others. The idea that, in order to learn something, we have to use science means that a particular science can be either a constitutive element of a larger scientific system or preliminary to a more specialized science. On the other hand, understanding uses opinion because it needs information not to strengthen or enlarge knowledge, but to establish what is most useful to action. The knowledge that contributes to *μανθάνειν* because it is always true can therefore be used by understanding as an opinion, for it is useful to action in some circumstances and not in others, although it obviously remains always true. If we have to deliberate about the way to preserve health after eating a meal, understanding considers the possibility of going for a walk—since a walk makes for good digestion, which is the condition for health—and rules out the possibility of adding a helping of chicken to the meal (although the causal connection between chicken meat and good digestion is always true and well-founded from a scientific point of view).

The second reason why 1143a14–16 is interesting is the dialectical context in which Aristotle has placed his account of understanding. In 1143a9–10 he recalls that practical wisdom prescribes what we ought to do or not to do (τί δεῖ πράττειν ἢ μὴ), thereby evoking the problematic structure of the starting-point of deliberation and its dialectical origin. A πρόβλημα, which can also be solved by its reduction to a syllogistic figure,<sup>68</sup> allows us to assume one of the two alternatives of the contradiction in order to test its truth or, in the case of a practical option, its feasibility. This clarifies what Aristotle claims at 1143a14–15, i.e. that understanding is useful for judging the things that practical wisdom will prescribe us when *someone tells us about them* (ἄλλου λέγοντος). When we listen to someone conducting deliberative reasoning or giving a prescription, understanding should enable us to evaluate the effectiveness of the deliberation or prescription. The words ἄλλου λέγοντος can be interpreted as referring to a dialogue or a discussion where one interlocutor assesses and refutes the deliberative reasoning of the other; but they can also allude to the reasonableness of a sensible person who receives a prescription and is able to understand its right cause. This situation is similar to the one of the citizen who both rules and is ruled, which Aristotle discusses in the *Politics*. A free adult man can happen to be part of the government and therefore give prescriptions, or be ruled and exercise the virtue of obedience—though not in the same way as the desiring soul obeys reason's orders, but like someone who potentially possess prescriptive reason.

Finally, the prescriptive character of practical wisdom emerges from the treatment in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI 13. This chapter contains four aporiae, as well as the relevant discussions and solutions, concerning the relationship of practical wisdom with theoretical wisdom and ethical virtue. While discussing these aporiae, on at least two occasions (1143b33–35; 1145a6–9) Aristotle raises the issue of the prescriptive and guiding role of practical wisdom. A brief discussion of the four aporiae is in order.<sup>69</sup> The first aporia (1143b18–21) is about the respective usefulness of theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom:

68 Cf. *An. pr.* 26b31–32; 43b34 f.

69 The relationship between practical wisdom, theoretical wisdom, and ethical virtue, or “virtue of character”, has been often and variously analyzed, with some commentators interpreting Aristotle's position as a rather intellectualistic one. See, e.g., though with different positions, H. Lorenz, “Virtue of Character in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*”, cit., who aims at showing that virtues of character are not peculiar to the desiring soul but also belong to the rational soul, which is able “to grasp suitable reasons for acting in certain ways if and when such reasons arise” (178); and U. Coope, “Why does Aristotle Think that Ethical Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?”, cit., who addresses the issue of the relation of practical wisdom to ethical virtue from the point of view of self-control. According

Difficulties might be raised as to the utility of these qualities of mind. For theoretical wisdom (σοφία) will contemplate none of the things that will make a man happy (for it is not concerned with any coming into being), and though practical wisdom has this merit, for what purpose do we need it (τίνος ἔνεκα δεῖ αὐτῆς)?

Aristotle has argued that each of them is an intellectual virtue of a different part of the soul (1143b16: ἄλλου τῆς ψυχῆς μορίου ἀρετὴ ἑκατέρω): theoretical wisdom is the virtue of theoretical reason, practical wisdom the virtue of practical reason. The *aporia* asks whether and how theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom are useful (χρήσιμοι). Theoretical wisdom does not concern itself with what helps human beings to become happy; as for practical wisdom, to what end is it necessary? The question about the goal of practical wisdom raises the issue as to the priority of ethical virtue over practical wisdom, for even if it certainly has as its object the way to attain happiness, it does not posit the end nor is it sufficient to attain it.

The second *aporia* is as follows:

Practical wisdom is the quality of mind concerned with things just and noble and good for human beings, but these are the things which it is the mark of good people to do, and we are none the more able to act for knowing them if the virtues are states, just as we are none the better able to act for knowing the things that are healthy and sound, in the sense not of producing but of issuing from the state of health; for we are none the more able to act for having the art of medicine or of gymnastics.<sup>70</sup>

Practical wisdom is about just, noble, and good actions not because it is the same as ethical virtue—this latter being a state, *ἔξις*—but in the same way as medicine and gymnastics are about healthy things. Practical wisdom is concerned with virtuous actions in that virtuous actions are prescribed, not produced, by *φρόνησις*.

The third *aporia* is linked to the second:

---

to Coope, the self-controlled man is the one that does not enjoy the special kind of pleasure deriving from virtuous practice. Different perspectives, including the political and pedagogic targets pursued by practical wisdom, in E. Berti, "Ragione pratica e normatività in Aristotele", in Id., *Nuovi studi aristotelici* 111: *Filosofia pratica*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2008, 25–36, and Z. Hitz, "Aristotle on Law and Moral Education", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 42 (2012), 264–306.

70 1143b22–28.

But if we are to say that it is useful (χρήσιμον) not for the sake of this but for the sake of becoming good, practical wisdom will be of no use to those who are good; but again it is of no use to those who are not; for it will make no difference whether they have practical wisdom themselves or *obey others who have it*, and it would be enough for us to do what we do in the case of health; though we wish to become healthy, yet we do not learn the art of medicine.<sup>71</sup>

In short, the second and third aporiae pose the following problem: the wise are not virtuous because they are wise, but because they possess the habit of virtue; the virtuous can be virtuous even if they are deprived of practical wisdom, for they can obey the orders (i.e. the prescriptions) of those who do possess wisdom.

The last aporia is linked more closely to the issue of the prescriptive function of practical wisdom and the position of it with regard to theoretical wisdom:

Besides this, it would be thought strange if practical wisdom, being inferior to theoretical wisdom, is to be put in authority over it, as seems to be implied by the fact that the art which produces anything rules and prescribes about that thing.<sup>72</sup>

From the discussion of the second and third aporiae it emerges that, because of the difference between practical wisdom and ethical virtue, to possess practical wisdom does not amount to possessing the habit of virtue, which could be acquired just by obeying the rules of conduct prescribed by virtuous people. Aristotle's answer to this problem consists in clarifying the relationship between ethical virtue and practical wisdom with respect to the moral end and choice, i.e. the starting-point and the ultimate goal of deliberation:

The function of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with ethical virtue; for ethical virtue makes the aim right, and practical wisdom the things leading to it.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> 1143b28–33.

<sup>72</sup> 1143b33–36: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἄτοπον ἂν εἶναι δόξειεν, εἰ χείρων τῆς σοφίας οὐσα κυριωτέρα αὐτῆς ἔσται· ἢ γὰρ ποιοῦσα ἄρχει καὶ ἐπιτάττει περὶ ἕκαστον. περὶ δὲ τούτων λεκτέον· νῦν μὲν γὰρ ἡ πόρῃται περὶ αὐτῶν μόνον.

<sup>73</sup> 1144a6–9.

Virtue makes the choice right, but the question of the things which should naturally be done to carry out our choice belongs not to virtue but to another faculty.<sup>74</sup>

The goodness of the choice derives from the goodness of the end; the goodness of the end derives from the possession of a good habit; therefore, the good habit makes the choice good. On the other hand, it is practical wisdom that has to find out what must be done in order to achieve the end; it provides the causal link between an act that appears worth performing, and the ultimate end. The close connection between practical wisdom and ethical virtue emerges from deliberative reasoning not when it has its natural hypothetico-problematic form, but when it is converted into a syllogism. In this case, the virtuous character of the major extreme is passed on to the minor extreme through a middle term, i.e. a cause, which is identified by practical wisdom. It is then no coincidence that precisely in such a context, at 1144a31–32, Aristotle introduces the celebrated formulation of “the syllogisms about actions (οἱ συλλογισμοὶ τῶν πρακτῶν)”, whose major extreme is always “the end and the best”. This is the principle of normative syllogisms as well as the cause of the prescriptive nature of the conclusion, i.e. choice. These syllogisms are not just the product of practical wisdom:

This is not evident except to good people; for wickedness perverts us and causes us to be deceived about the starting-points of action. Therefore it is evident that it is impossible to be practically wise without being good.<sup>75</sup>

The goodness of the end is determined by virtue. But it is practical wisdom that establishes what we are to do in order to realize a good purpose:

It is clear, then, from what has been said, that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral excellence.<sup>76</sup>

It is perhaps more difficult to find a solution to the first and fourth aporiae, which concern the relationship between practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom. Aristotle claims that σοφία is also conducive to happiness, though not in

---

74 1144a19–22.

75 1144a34–b1.

76 1144b30–32.



the way medicine causes health, but like health itself.<sup>77</sup> This is because theoretical wisdom is a constitutive element of the happy life. It is important to notice the use of the verb ποιεῖν in 1144a3 (ποιοῦσι): theoretical and practical wisdom in a way “produce” the happy life, but not in the sense the verb “produce” has when referred to productive sciences such as medicine. Here Aristotle seems to be using the term ποιεῖν in a sense which is slightly different from the one he attributes elsewhere to the noun ποίησις. In 1143b33–36, when claiming that “it would be thought strange if practical wisdom, being inferior to theoretical wisdom, is to be put in authority over it”, Aristotle arguably alludes to a pragmatic point of view, widespread but different from his own, whereby such sciences as do not literally produce anything distinct and separate are worthless with regard to practical needs. From this pragmatic point of view, the happiness we lack but would like to achieve is as the health of a sick person, which can be recovered through therapy, not medical theory. To this, Aristotle responds that happiness is impossible without the virtuous habit, and that it consists not in possessing the goods, but using them as well as using the arts that produce them. This view is consistent with the hierarchy he establishes elsewhere between auxiliary and prescriptive sciences, the latter being able to “make use” of the former. There arises then a problem about the different degrees of authority between theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom:

But again it [= practical wisdom] is not supreme over theoretical wisdom, i.e. over the superior part of us, any more than the art of medicine is over health; for *it does not use it* but provides for its coming into being; it prescribes, then, for its sake, but not to it. Further, to maintain its supremacy would be like saying that the art of politics rules the gods because it prescribes about all the affairs of the state.<sup>78</sup>

Particularly significant in this passage is the sentence οὐ γὰρ χρήται αὐτῇ (1145a8), which explains why practical wisdom, though prescriptive and hence

77 1144a3–5: “They (scil. theoretical and practical wisdom) do produce (ποιοῦσι) something, not as the art of medicine produces health, however, but as health produces health; so does theoretical wisdom produce happiness: for, being a part of virtue entire, by being possessed and by actualizing itself it makes a man happy”.

78 1145a6–11: ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ κυρία γ’ ἐστὶ τῆς σοφίας οὐδὲ τοῦ βελτίονος μορίου, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τῆς ὑγείας ἡ ἱατρικὴ· οὐ γὰρ χρήται αὐτῇ, ἀλλ’ ὅρᾳ ὅπως γένηται· ἐκείνης οὖν ἕνεκα ἐπιτάττει, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐκείνη. ἔτι ὁμοιον καὶ εἴ τις τὴν πολιτικὴν φαίη ἄρχειν τῶν θεῶν, ὅτι ἐπιτάττει περὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν τῇ πόλει.

superior to many other productive arts and sciences, is not superior to theoretical wisdom. For practical wisdom *does not use* theoretical wisdom, although it may use different kinds of notions for the sake of its coming to being. Here Aristotle perhaps alludes to the topic of practical wisdom prescribing the production of physical and material goods in order to allow human beings to perform the highest activity they are capable of, i.e. the theoretical one. But this passage suggests a further idea: practical activities and the kinds of notions guiding them must be placed in a hierarchical order such that the prescription given by a science to an inferior art aims to attain an end other than that of both the productive art and the prescribing science. This is the case of practical wisdom, for it prescribes actions concerning material goods only in order to make intellectual activity possible. Prescriptive capacity is therefore an authority, but is exercised “as a service”.

## 6 Prescription and Moral Character

As we have seen, the solution to the aporia raised by Aristotle in *Eth. nic.* 1143b28–36—i.e. that people not (yet) virtuous or wise can act in accord with the moral good by obeying the wise, just as the sick recover by following medical prescriptions, not studying medicine—can be found in the argument offered at 1144a6–8: ethical virtue and practical wisdom are both necessary, the former identifying the end, the latter finding the means to it. A virtuous and wise person, therefore, has the habit of virtue and is able to deliberate well. However, the remark that people who lack either intellectual or ethical virtue can act well by obeying the wise and virtuous preserves its significance if considered in the light of the Aristotelian principle that ethical virtue is a disposition of the desiring soul and resides in character, which is acquired through habit.<sup>79</sup> The custom of performing a certain good action starts with the teaching and implementation of the prescribed rules.

To reconstruct the role played by prescription in building the moral character, we have to turn to the first chapters of the 11 book of the *Eudemian Ethics*. In lines 1220a36–b20 a relationship is established between moral character and prescription that, despite some textual problems, can be summarized as follows. First, moral character develops habit through custom (1220b1); second, custom forms in those who, though lacking an innate principle of movement,

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1151a10–19.

are able to follow a guide (ἀγωγή) that moves them *frequently* (πολλάκις) in a certain way (1220b2–3); therefore, character is a quality of the irrational part of the soul which can obey reason; it develops thanks to a prescriptive discourse (1220b5–7). In the next lines (1220b7 ff.), Aristotle claims that character is determined by passions and states (ἔξεις). However, it is only with reference to the latter that we can speak of a quality of character: ἔξεις are acquired states of the irrational soul in virtue of which human beings are either affected in a certain way (πάσχειν πως), or remain unaffected (ἀπαθείς). From the point of view of the nature of the irrational soul, it is neither the propensity to πάσχειν (i.e. what Aristotle calls, in this passage, δύναμις τοῦ παθήματος; see 1220b8 and *Eth. nic.* 1105b19 ff.), nor the actual presence of a πάθημα that reveals the moral quality of someone's character. The moral quality of character is revealed by the ἔξεις that allows us either to avoid falling prey to passion, though we are in a condition conducive to the rise of a πάθημα; or to experience a πάθημα in a way that reduces its negative effects on conduct:

By 'faculty' I mean that in virtue of which people who act from their passions are called after them. E.g. are called irascible, insensible, amorous, bashful, shameless. And habits are the causes through which these faculties belong to us either in a reasonable way (κατὰ λόγον) or the opposite, e.g. bravery, temperance, cowardice, intemperance.<sup>80</sup>

The expression κατὰ λόγον at 1220b19 indicates conformity to prescriptive reason, the λόγος ἐπιτακτικός. Prescriptive reason has to give a rule whose general meaning is that of *limit*, i.e. the ὅρος Aristotle discusses elsewhere. Obedience to the λόγος ἐπιτακτικός contributes to the development of habit and hence of character; prescription is the ἀγωγή μὴ ἔμφυτος Aristotle mentions at 1220b1–2 as the guide coming from an external authority. The desiring soul is unable to find by itself the right practical direction, and we can say there is no moral character without prescription, i.e. if the rational component of the soul is unable to transform its prescriptive *logos* into a practical guide which desire may follow. At 1221b30–1222a5, Aristotle argues once again that if character is a quality of the desiring soul, it will be good or bad with respect to pleasures and pains, not in general but insofar as it pursues some of them and avoids others:

<sup>80</sup> *Eth. eud.* 1220b16–20.

It therefore follows that the moral character is vicious or virtuous by reason of pursuing or avoiding certain pleasures and pains (ἀνάγκη δὴ φαῦλον τὸ ἦθος καὶ σπουδαῖον εἶναι τῷ διώκειν καὶ φεύγειν ἡδονὰς τινὰς καὶ λύπας).<sup>81</sup>

The term τινὰς suggests that the quality of character is also linked with the ability to choose some pleasures instead of others, i.e. to evaluate pleasure by a standard provided by reason. The desiring soul turns to such objects as make it better or worse:

For our state of soul is related to and concerned with such things as have the property of making every person's spirit worse and better. But we say that people are wicked owing to pleasures and pains, through *pursuing and avoiding the wrong ones or in the wrong way* (δι' ἡδονὰς δὲ καὶ λύπας φαύλους εἶναι φαμέν, τῷ διώκειν καὶ φεύγειν ἢ ὥς μὴ δεῖ ἢ ἄς μὴ δεῖ).<sup>82</sup>

In Aristotle's view moral character has, at least in part, a natural origin too; he regards human beings as to some extent predisposed to a certain kind of actions and customs. This is not inconsistent with the theory that the moral quality of a character is an acquired state, because a natural tendency is precisely the adequate matter, so to speak, for the acquiring of a virtuous habit, which needs to be strengthened by constant action.<sup>83</sup>

That nature plays a prominent role in character formation, and that it can come into conflict with prescriptive reason, is a fact Aristotle is well aware of. He addresses this topic in a context where he apparently aims to prepare the shift from ethical to political thinking. This is why the closing chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is problematic: it heavily emphasizes that it is impossible to lead everyone to the good through persuasion. Such an effort can only be successful with those, especially among the young, who are naturally endowed with the best qualities; with the others coercion, i.e. the authority of the law, rather than persuasion must be used:

81 1221b32–34.

82 1221b40–1222a2.

83 Cf. *Eth. nic.* 1144b1–8: “As practical wisdom is to cleverness—not the same, but like it—so is natural virtue to virtue in the strict sense. For all people think that each type of character belongs to its possessors in some sense by nature; for from the very moment of birth we are just fitted for self-control or brave or have the other moral qualities; but yet we seek something else as that which is good in the strict sense—we seek for the presence of such qualities in another way”.

While they [*scil.* arguments capable of making people good] seem to have power to encourage and stimulate the generous-minded among the young, and to make a character which is gently born, and a true lover of what is noble, ready to be possessed by virtue, they are not able to encourage the many to nobility and goodness. For these do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear, and do not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness but through fear and punishment ... what argument would remould such people? It is hard, if not impossible, to remove by argument the traits that have long since been incorporated in the character.<sup>84</sup>

Those who live as passion directs will not hear argument that dissuade them, nor understand it; and how can we persuade someone in such a state to change their ways? And in general passion seems to yield not to argument but to force. The character, then, must somehow be there already with a kinship to virtue, loving what is noble and hating what is base.<sup>85</sup>

In these passages Aristotle shows his concern that prescriptive reason, construed as an "argument", may not be sufficient to prompt most people to adopt a virtuous behaviour, if there is no natural tendency to do so. It is fairly clear that he is preparing the ground for the introduction of the concept of authority. In other words, he is not dealing with moral education or the development of the individual character, but rather with the law as a directive principle of action for the sake of the cohesion of the civic and political community. From this point of view, paternal authority is insufficient too, since it is limited to the family and inferior to the authority of the *nomos*, which is ratified by reason and founded on it.<sup>86</sup>

Aristotle seems therefore to entertain some doubts about the effectiveness of prescription. Prescription is effective for those who have a natural bent towards moral virtue, just as certain directions are effective for those who are already adequately prepared to accept and implement them.<sup>87</sup> However, it is

84 *Eth. nic.* 1179b7–18.

85 1179b26–31.

86 Cf. 1180a18–22.

87 See *Eth. nic.* 1181b1–8: "Laws are as it were the works of the political art; how then can one learn from them to be a legislator, or judge which are best? Even medical men do not seem to be made by a study of text-books. Yet people try, at any rate, not only the treatments, but also how particular classes of people can be cured and should be treated, distinguishing

useful to the present inquiry to have shown that prescription is necessary for the development of character.

## 7 *Ergon and chresis*

An important contribution to the understanding of the prescriptive nature of practical wisdom is provided by the relationship Aristotle establishes between *ἔργον*<sup>88</sup> and use (*χρήσις*). The analysis of this complex relationship will shed light on a particular problem, i.e. the distinction between possessing prescriptive authority and being able to realize what is prescribed. Prescription entails the knowledge of the end for the sake of which the order to realize a certain task is given, though not necessarily the knowledge of the rules for the realization of the task. The difference between the knowledge of an end and that of the art for attaining it is important because of the way the topic of prescription is applied to the political context. But I will discuss this issue in the next chapter.

At the beginning of the 11 book of *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle defines the virtue of something as “the best disposition or state or faculty of all things that have a use and function (ἡ βελτίστη διάθεσις ἢ ἕξις ἢ δύναμις ἐκάστων, ὅσων ἐστί τις χρήσις ἢ ἔργον)”.<sup>89</sup> To understand this passage, where the notions of *διάθεσις*, *ἕξις* and *δύναμις* are used to define virtue, we have to recall what Aristotle claims in *Cat.* 6b2–3 and 8b27, and most notably in *Metaph.* 1019b5–6 and 1022b10–12. *Διάθεσις* is a state or a quality which is neither essential nor unchanging, but impermanent and subject to change; it is linked with *δύναμις*, for *δύναμις* refers to the potentiality for being in a certain way or not being in that way (e.g. for

---

the various states; but while this seems useful to experienced people, to the ignorant it is valueless. Surely, then, ... collections of laws, and of constitutions also, may be serviceable to those who can study them and judge what is good or bad and what enactments suit what circumstances ...”.

88 The most common translation, although controversial, of this term is “function”; some scholars propose “work”, see S. Everson, “Aristotle on nature and value”, in S. Everson (ed.), *Companion to ancient thought*, 4: *Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 1998, 78; T. Irwin, *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics*, cit., 404; S.H. Baker, “The Concept of *Ergon*: Towards an Achievement Interpretation of Aristotle’s Function Argument”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 48 (2015), 254. For other translations, see S.H. Baker, *art. cit.*, 229. The first anonymous reviewer of my book correctly observed that “function” does not totally fit this context, in which human action and social practice are being investigated. Therefore, I prefer to use the transcription of the Greek word whenever the word is, or might be, related to human practice rather than to natural and artificial objects.

89 *Eth. eud.* 1218b37–1219a1.

being healthy, then sick, and then healthy again); a δῖαθεσις is also a ἔξις, i.e. the state of a thing in accord with its essence and by reference to which we say a thing is well or badly disposed. If we apply this set of notions to *Eth. eud.* 1218b37–1219a1, where also χρῆσις and ἔργον occur, here is what we get. Virtue is the best disposition a thing can acquire according to its nature, even if it is not a permanent state; it is the best disposition by reference to which we judge the temporary disposition in which a certain thing or person happens to be or act on different occasions. Human virtue, therefore, is the state that human beings have the potentiality for acquiring in accord with their nature of rational and social animals. By reference to this state, we judge the disposition in which a human being happens to be at some time.

It is in this context that the concept of *ergon* is introduced:

Let this then be assumed, and also that virtue is the best disposition or state or faculty of all things that have a use and function (χρῆσις ἢ ἔργον). This is clear by induction; for in all cases we lay this down: e.g. a garment has a virtue, for it has a function and use, and the best state of the garment is its virtue. Similarly a vessel, house, or anything else has a virtue ...<sup>90</sup>

Experience, or induction, can provide examples of virtue for both natural and artificial things. Each thing has a disposition in accord with its nature; in this disposition, it is possible to find the function for the sake of which that thing is produced by either nature or art. In addition, the function represents the outcome for the sake of which we make use of something. The example of the garment suggests that, if the garment is made to shelter from the cold, since this is its ἔργον, its virtue will consist in sheltering from the cold and nothing else, although it can be used for other goals, which do not correspond to its nature and the end for which it was made. The correct use of the garment consists in wearing it when it is cold, and hence not just in using it as a personal piece of clothing, but in using it when the circumstances prompt us to use it so as to get from it the best possible result. In this chapter Aristotle gives further examples of artificial and natural objects (the house and the ship at 1219a4, the soul at 1219a5 and the eye at 1219a16; cf. *Eth. nic.* 1106a16–17) in order to clarify the various senses assumed in this particular context by the notions of *ergon* and use. In the case of the eye, we can derive its function directly from its use, since the goal of the eye is to see, and we see simply by using it. We might add that

90 1218b37–1219a5. The argument is illustrated also in *Eth. nic.* 1097b25–1098a20 and clearly recalls Plat. *Resp.* 352e–353e.

the eye must be used in the conditions allowing it to perform its function in the best way, e.g. when there is light. Aristotle does not explicitly mention here the fact that the use of something must take into account the disposition, the state, the potentiality as well as the circumstances in which the use takes place, since not all circumstances are equally favourable. This omission, however, is justified by the specificity of the context. The reference to the circumstances in which the function is realized is paramount in Aristotle's eyes, as is clear from *Metaph.* 993b20–24:

The end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is action. For even if they consider how things are, practical men do not study what is eternal but what stands in some relation at some time.<sup>91</sup>

Practical knowledge considers “how things are (τὸ πῶς ἔχει)” in order to grasp not the permanent and necessary aspects of reality, but those that are conducive to the realization of a purpose; to do so, practical knowledge considers the moment, i.e. the circumstances. The prominence attached to the πρὸς τι καὶ νῦν does not rule out the regularity of action. The πρακτικοί Aristotle is thinking of, in the *Metaphysics* passage, are people who act in a deliberate and sometimes scientific way: the observation of reality, even if it has a practical aim, includes the inquiry into its causes and the understanding of the factual conditions and the properties of beings that make possible the best use of things and the achievement of their function. The broader this knowledge, the easier it is to use things according to their excellence, just as we will use a garment according to its excellence if we know to what end it has been produced, and are able to seize the right moment to use it.

Aristotle's concept of *ergon* clearly emerges from *Eth. eud.* 1219a6–18:

Let us assume that the better state has the better function; and as the states are to one another, so let us assume the corresponding functions to be to one another. And the function of anything is its end; it is clear, therefore, from this that the function is better than the state; for the end is best, as being end; for we assumed the best, the final stage, to be the end for the sake of which all else exists. That the function, then, is better than the state or condition is plain. But ‘function’ has two senses; for some things have a function beyond mere employment, as building has a

91 Θεωρητικῆς μὲν γὰρ τέλος ἀλήθεια πρακτικῆς δ' ἔργον· καὶ γὰρ ἂν τὸ πῶς ἔχει σκοπῶσιν, οὐ τὸ αἶδιον ἀλλ' ὃ πρὸς τι καὶ νῦν θεωροῦσιν οἱ πρακτικοί.



house and not the act of building, medicine health and not the act of curing and restoring to health; while the function of other things is just their employment, e.g. of vision seeing and of mathematical science contemplation. Hence, necessarily, in those whose function is their employment the employment is more valuable than the state.<sup>92</sup>

From this passage we can derive three points. First, the quality of the *ergon* is proportional to the quality of the habit that makes it possible. The better the state, the better the *ergon* resulting from it; and, more importantly, the hierarchical relationship between the states is the one obtaining between the *erga*. Second, since the *ergon* is the same as the end, it is superior to the state that makes it possible. Finally, the *ergon* is not always separate from the use we make of a being in the same way as health is separate from the use of a medical tool or from the exercise of medical science. Sometimes the *ergon* coincides with use: for example vision coincides with the use of the eye.

These three aspects are all extremely significant for the topic of prescription, particularly in the political domain. The view that the quality of the *ergon* is proportional to that of the state producing it, and that the *ergon* of a better state is better, provides the basis for the hierarchical organization of tasks within the political structure. The different value of the respective *erga* is linked with the hierarchy that we can establish between the ends; but since the quality of the *ergon* derives from the quality of the state producing it, the difference of the ends corresponds to a difference in the quality of the citizens. The *ergon* is always superior to the state because it represents its realization through a use or an activity. Even if the term *ἔξις* is the most frequently used in this chapter, we should not forget that at the beginning Aristotle used *ἔξις* along with *διάθεσις* and *δύναμις*, which both indicate a potential state. Thus *ἔξις* is inferior, so to speak, to *ergon*, in the same way as potentiality is inferior to actuality. That the *ergon* of a thing or a person is sometimes different from the use of the thing or the activity of the person, while sometimes it is identi-

92 Τῆς βελτίονος δὴ ἔξεως ἔστω βέλτιον τὸ ἔργον· καὶ ὡς ἔχουσιν. αἱ ἔξεις πρὸς ἀλλήλας, οὕτω καὶ τὰ ἔργα τὰ ἀπὸ τούτων πρὸς ἀλλήλα ἐχέτω. καὶ τέλος ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον. φανερόν τοῖνυν ἐκ τούτων ὅτι βέλτιον τὸ ἔργον τῆς ἔξεως· τὸ γὰρ τέλος ἄριστον ὡς τέλος· ὑπόκειται γὰρ τέλος τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον, οὐ ἕνεκα τᾶλλα πάντα. ὅτι μὲν τοῖνυν τὸ ἔργον βέλτιον τῆς ἔξεως καὶ τῆς διαθέσεως, δῆλον· ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐργονυλέγεται διχῶς. τῶν μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἕτερόν τι τὸ ἔργον παρὰ τὴν χρῆσιν, οἷον οἰκοδομικῆς οἰκία ἀλλ' οὐκ οἰκοδόμησις καὶ ἰατρικῆς ὑγίεια ἀλλ' οὐχ ὑγίανσις οὐδ' ἰάτρευσις, τῶν δ' ἡ χρῆσις ἔργον, οἷον ὕψεως ὄρασις καὶ μαθηματικῆς ἐπιστήμης θεωρία. ὥστ' ἀνάγκη, ὦν ἔργον ἢ χρῆσις, τὴν χρῆσιν βέλτιον εἶναι τῆς ἔξεως.

cal with them, depends on the difference between productive activities, whose end is a separate product, and practical ones, whose end lies in their performance. Aristotle claims that the *ergon* is sometimes “beyond” use (παρὰ τὴν χρῆσιν, 1219a14), sometimes identical with it. In the second case, *the use too*, being the same as the end, is better than the state (1219a17–18: ὥστ’ ἀνάγκη, ὦν ἔργον ἢ χρῆσις, τὴν χρῆσιν βέλτιον εἶναι τῆς ἕξεως). This remark suggests that, if *ergon* is separated from use, use is inferior to it, though in a different way from ἕξις. For this latter is always inferior to *ergon*, whereas use is inferior to *ergon* only when it consists in the use of instruments and procedures for attaining an end whose notion is not identical with that of the instruments and procedures. For instance, in such productive arts as architecture and medicine, the *erga*, i.e. the house and recovery, are achieved by the use of instruments and procedures (calculations, diagnoses, etc.) whose notion is not identical with that of the house and recovery. Not only are the house and recovery separate things from the actions that produce them; they also continue to exist after those actions have stopped. By contrast, when the *ergon* of a thing or an activity is achieved through the use of the thing or the performance of the activity, then use is superior to the state. This case has to be connected with the activities Aristotle calls practical to distinguish them from productive ones.

For now, we may take Aristotle to mean that *ergon* is superior to the state because (i) state is in general the condition that makes the *ergon* possible, but it may remain unrealized, as is the case when medical science is learnt by someone who then gives it up and so fails to achieve the recovery of anyone; or (ii) because the ἕξις may also be a set of notions developed in accord with the *ergon* they must realize, even when they have no effect. The knowledge possessed by a doctor always takes on such a form as to be useful to achieve recovery, since it is with a view to recovery that the habit of the doctor is formed.

Another important passage for understanding Aristotle’s concepts of *ergon* and *chresis*, is *Eth. eud.* 1242a11–18:

The justice belonging to the friendship of those useful to one another is pre-eminently justice, for it is civic or political justice. The concurrence of the saw and the art that uses it is of another sort; for it is not for some end common to both—it is like instrument and soul—but for the sake of the user. It is true that the tool itself receives attention, and it is just that it should receive it, for its function, that is; for it exists for the sake of its function ... And the essence of a gimlet is twofold, but more properly (τὸ κυριώτερον) it is its activity (ἐνέργεια), namely boring holes. In this class come the body and a slave.

Aristotle distinguishes the cooperation that is based on the search for the common good—in which the political just resides—from the “cooperation” between an instrument and the art that makes use of it.<sup>93</sup> The instrument and the art that makes use of it cooperate with a view to users (τοῦ χρωμένου ἕνεκεν), that is, presumably, the craftsmen who use instruments in order to produce certain objects. On the other hand, it seems that the essence of any instrument is twofold (διττόν) in that any *organon* has a main (κυριώτερον) function, exactly the one because of which others use it. The main function of a gimlet, for instance, is boring holes. If the *main* function of the gimlet is boring holes, what is its secondary function? Plausibly Aristotle implies that each instrument possesses, alongside the primary function, also the function of “contributing” (see the verb συνήλθον at 1242a13) to the attainment of this or that purpose.<sup>94</sup> For instance, gimlets contribute, in broad sense, to making furnishings. To the same class as gimlets belong instruments such as body and slave. Although

93 On this subject see the essays collected in F. Leigh (ed.), *The Eudemian Ethics on the Voluntary, Friendship, and Luck. The Sixth S.V. Keeling Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2012.

94 For the double meaning of *ergon*, see *Metaph.* 1050a21–36: “For the action is the end, and the actuality is the action (τὸ γὰρ ἔργον τέλος, ἡ δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον). Therefore, even the word ‘actuality’ is derived from ‘action’, and points to the fulfilment. And while in some cases the exercise is the ultimate thing ... from some things a product follows ... yet none the less the act is in the former case the end and in the latter more of an end than the mere potentiality is. For the act of building is the thing that is being built, and comes to be—and is—as the same time as the house (ἅμα γίγνεται καὶ ἔστι τῇ οἰκίᾳ). Where, then, the result is something apart from the exercise, the actuality is in the thing that is being made ... but when there is no product apart from the actuality, the actuality is in the agents ...”. On this text see S. Broadie, “Where Is the Activity?”, in J. Lennox-R. Bolton (eds.), *Being, Nature, and Life in Aristotle. Essays in Honor of Allan Gotthelf*, CUP, Cambridge 2010, 198–211, esp. 202–204. This *Metaphysics* passage is greatly relevant for the double meaning of *ergon* also for ethical contexts. Aristotle argues that the *ergon*, i.e. the end of an act, may be either the exercise of a certain activity (vision is the end of seeing), or a separate product (the house is the end of building). He then explains that in both cases the end is the actualization of a potentiality, which is present in the principle of action (the eye, the architect). For example, the act of building, οἰκοδόμησις, is “together” with the house in a manner that is analogous (analogous, at least, from the point of view of the relationship between potentiality and actuality) to the concomitance of the act of seeing with the vision. (I am indebted to Enrico Berti for the understanding of this *Metaphysics* passage.) From this we can draw the following conclusion about practical and productive activities: the end of an activity can be either the proper performance of the activity itself, or a separate product; but also the *ergon* of productive activities rests on the good and effective use of the appropriate tools and rules of art by producers.

there are no explicit references to the topics of prescription, body and slave are significant examples of realities that are subject to prescriptive authority: body can be the instrument of prescriptive reason, slaves receive prescriptions from their masters.

The quoted passage is interesting for more than one reason. First, it allows us to attribute to Aristotle a distinction between the notion of *performance*, i.e. the realization of the (main) *ergon* in accord with the nature of the instrument (e.g. boring holes), and that of *production*, i.e. the realization of something for which the function of the instrument is needed. Such a distinction only partially corresponds to the distinction between action and production and raises a question that will be further discussed in the next chapter, that is, the question of the role played by some types of performative action and some types of production into political and social contexts. According to the example of the gimlet and its main function, performance resembles *prattein* rather than *poiein* because it is described as an action whose end coincides with its implementation. But the sort of performative action that I tried to derive from the idea of the *κυριώτερον ἔργον* qualifies the *organon*, whose function is always used for the sake of something else.

Second: despite the fact that Aristotle has clarified the difference between natural or technical functions (those of eye, saw, gimlet) and political cooperation in which people act in view of a common good, the distinction between performance and production can also be applied to the cooperative activities that are performed by citizens, so suggesting that almost every human being inserted into a social organization, as well as almost every activity useful for the functioning of such an organization, may have a double function. The quoted passage 1242a11–18 confirms that the ability to use instruments is to a certain extent prescriptive, when it is construed as either the “use” a human being makes of another human being to achieve a given end, or the use an art makes of another art for the attainment of a given purpose. Those who use also prescribe, in that they demand or order certain services from those who serve. So, the distinction between performance and production might imply that almost every activity can be both prescriptive, when demanding the production of what it is needed to achieve an end, and also auxiliary when implementing its main function, because, so doing, it also produces something that will be used by others (e.g. holes are needed to make furnishings; or, more significantly, the maneuvers ordered by a sub-officer are necessary to his superiors for military purposes). The idea of double function is of particular relevance if viewed in the light of the hierarchy of ends.

# Prescription and Architectonic Order

## 1 Prescription and Politics. Preliminary Remarks

At the end of the previous chapter, I introduced the notions of ἔργον and χρῆσις and their relationship with the hierarchy of ends. In the first part of this chapter, I will go deeper into this topic. I will discuss the notions of ἔργον and χρῆσις with respect to the concepts of action (πρᾶξις) and production (ποίησις), in order to illustrate the political significance of prescription.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* the division of ends into ἔργα and ἐνέργειαι is almost at once dropped in favour of another topic, i.e. the variety and multiplicity of the ends helping to achieve an ultimate end (1094a7 ff.). These ends are intermediate ends of activities that cooperate in order to attain an ultimate good. The science having the ultimate good as its object is architec-

1 The so-called “*ergon*-argument”, treated in *Eth. eud.* 1218b37–1219a39 and *Eth. nic.* 1097b25–1098a20, has been extensively studied in ethical contexts and it is impossible to provide an adequate overview of the secondary literature. In short, the main issues focused by the interpreters are the following three. First, the role that *ergon* plays in practical philosophy, in relation to that played in the philosophy of nature. Second, the difference between the *Eudemian* version of the theory of *ergon* and the *Nicomachean* version. Third, the implications of the theory on the conception of happiness and the highest good. As regards the first issue, see A. Gómez-Lobo, “The Ergon Inference”, *Phronesis*, 34 (1989), 170–184, repr. in J.P. Anton-A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, IV: *Aristotle’s Ethics*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1991, 43–58, and D. Achtenberg, “The Role of the *Ergon* Argument in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*”, *Ancient Philosophy*, 9 (1989), 37–48, repr. in J.P. Anton-A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, cit., 59–72. S. Everson, “Aristotle on Nature and Value”, in S. Everson (ed.), *Companion to Ancient Thought*, 4: *Ethics*, cit., 77–106, and R. Kraut, *Aristotle. Political Philosophy*, OUP, Oxford 2002, 64. Recent contributions on the relation between nature, practical normativity, and *ergon*, are in A.G. Vigo, “Naturalismo Trascendental. Una interpretación de la fundamentación aristotélica de la ética”, in C. Natali (ed.), *Aristotle: Metaphysics and Practical Philosophy. Essays in Honour of Enrico Berti*, Peeters, Leuven 2011, 111–142; and Jörn Müller, “*Ergon* und *Eudaimonia*. Plädoyer für eine unifizierende Interpretation der *Ergon*-Argumente in den aristotelischen *Ethiken*”, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 57 (2003), 513–542, who proposes a unifying interpretation according to which the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean* versions are substantially coherent with each other. See also C.D.C. Reeve, *Practices of Reason. Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1992, repr. 2002, 123–128; M. Pakaluk, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. An Introduction*, CUP, Cambridge 2005, 74–82; R. Barney, “Aristotle’s Argument for a Human Function”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (2008), 293–322, and S.H. Baker, “The Concept of *Ergon*”, cit.

tonic with regard to the sciences of the intermediate ends; likewise, the *πράξις* aiming to achieve the ultimate end is architectonic with regard to its auxiliary *πράξεις*. A non-architectonic art can be prescriptive with respect to another art which is subordinate to it. It is necessary, therefore, that practical sciences and *πράξεις* should be arranged in an order which is apparently independent of the distinction between *ἔργα* and *ἐνέργειαι*:

*A certain difference is found* (διαφορὰ δέ τις φαίνεται) among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities. Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth. But where such arts fall under a single capacity—as bridle-making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy, in the same way other arts fall under yet others—in all of these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued. *It makes no difference* (διαφέρει δ' οὐδέν) whether the activities themselves are the ends of the actions, or something else apart from the activities, as in the case of the sciences just mentioned.<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle introduces the idea of a hierarchical order of ends after evoking the difference between the end as a product and as an activity.<sup>3</sup> Yet he concludes that, precisely from the architectonic point of view, this difference has no significance. This conclusion can be accounted for by the treatment of the notion of *ergon* as emerging from the *Eudemian* texts we discussed at the end of the previous chapter. There Aristotle claimed that 1. virtue is the best state of anything that can be used and has an *ergon* (1219a1); 2. *ergon* has a double meaning depending on whether it is distinct from use or is the same as use (1219a13–17); 3. the essence of any instrument is twofold (διττόν) because the main *ergon* of an instrument is its *energeia* (1242a16–18). In the light of this third clarification we should say that the *ergon* of an architect consists *first of all* in the ability to

<sup>2</sup> *Eth. nic.* 1094a3–18.

<sup>3</sup> A very valuable analysis of the relationship between the pair action/production and the architectonic order of ends is J. Hübner, “Produktion und Praxis in der *Nikomachischen Ethik*”, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 62 (2008), 31–52; I am indebted to this essay at various points of my own inquiry in the present chapter.

perform all the necessary and useful acts for building: this ability is architect's *energeia*. Within a social organization, those who wish to own a house, or have decided that a building is needed, "use" architects because of their ability. The house is then a final cause; the ability to build is the efficient cause because of which those who wish a house use architects. This kind of social use may be configured also as prescription (someone prescribes an architect the construction of a building).

If we consider Aristotle's complex notion of *ergon* from the political perspective, we can advance the following hypothesis: according to Aristotle, almost every citizen is, in a certain sense, an instrument whose main *ergon* is her/his *energeia*.<sup>4</sup> By virtue of this main *ergon* the citizen is "used" for ends other than her/his *energeia* (i.e., a citizen is prescribed to perform her/his function by those who occupy a higher position, in order to achieve a given end). Consequently, the division of ends into *ἔργα* and *ἐνέργειαι* at *Eth. nic.* 1094a3–4, while alluding to the distinction between production and action, also establishes the double role of (almost) every being endowed with its own *ergon* within a hierarchical and cooperative system. In this framework is of great importance the notion of *εὐπραγία*: a production produces something distinct and separate but, in addition, it is also an *εὐπραγία*,<sup>5</sup> because producers must duly perform their main function (e.g. the gimlet bores *well*, the architect designs a *solid* building). We could say that the citizen's *ergon* is her/his task.

4 The idea that the citizen has an *ergon* is adumbrated in *Polit.* 1276b20–29 through the comparison of citizens and sailors: "Like the sailor, the citizen is a member of a community. Now, sailors have different capacities, for one of them is a rower, another a pilot, and a third a lookout man, a fourth is described by some similar term; and while the precise definition of each individual's virtue applies exclusively to him, there is, at the same time, a common definition applicable to them all. For they have all them the common object, which is safety in navigation. Similarly, one citizen differs from another, but the salvation of the community is the common business of them all (καὶ τῶν πολιτῶν, καίπερ ἀνομοίων ὄντων, ἡ σωτηρία τῆς κοινωνίας ἔργον ἐστί); 1276b39: "each citizen is expected to do his business well (δεῖ γ' ἕκαστον τὸ καθ' αὐτὸν ἔργον εὖ ποιεῖν)".

5 The notion of *εὐπραγία*, or *εὐπραξία*, though generally meaning "success" and the good outcome of action (cf. *Eth. eud.* 1221a39, 1233b25; *Eth. nic.* 1167a16; *Rhet.* 1367a4, 1387b23), is also importantly used by Aristotle in the Platonic sense of the "ability to do things well", see *Eth. nic.* 1098b21–22; 1139a34–35, 1139b3–4, and 1140b7 (ἔστι γὰρ αὐτῇ ἡ εὐπραξία τέλος). This meaning stresses the mastery of rules of conduct in both practical and productive activities, rather than good fortune and casual success. It is obtained from the usual simile of virtuous practice with craft, see Plat. *Euthyd.* 279e, 281b2, and *Protag.* 345a3–4. *Eupragia* is not only happiness, but also practical knowledge and mastery of technical rules. This idea is particularly relevant in Aristotle's political thought, as we can infer from *Polit.* 1325b10–23. See D. Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action*, cit., 154f.

The hierarchical order of ends which characterizes a social organization is dominated and regulated by an ultimate end beyond which there is no further objective. This end is the highest good, i.e. the common good, the knowledge of which has an important prescriptive value:

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good (τάγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἄριστον). Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely *to hit upon what we should* (ἂν τυγχάνοιμεν τοῦ δέοντος)?<sup>6</sup>

The phrase I have put in italics raises the question if the knowledge of common good might not allow us to understand what our own task is. It is not a rhetorical question, but a serious aporia looking forward to a problem Aristotle proposes shortly after, at 1096b35–1097a10: if by “good” we mean the universal concept of good or the “good in itself”, or the idea of the good, i.e. a univocal notion of good, then such a notion would turn out to be useless in action, since it would not be a good human beings could ever realize or attain.<sup>7</sup> Shortly afterwards Aristotle suggests again that a universal and univocal concept of good might play a prescriptive role.<sup>8</sup> Yet this suggestion is discarded at once, for the knowledge of the good itself or the Idea of good have no prescriptive utility for either practical or productive activities.<sup>9</sup> So, when at 1094a23–24 Aristotle asks whether it

6 *Eth. nic.* 1094a18–24.

7 *Eth. nic.* 1096b31–34: “And similarly with regard to the Idea, even if there is some one good which is universally predicable of goods or is capable of separate and independent existence, clearly it could not be achieved or attained by man; but we are now seeking something attainable”.

8 *Eth. nic.* 1096b34–1097a3: “Perhaps, however, some one might think it worthwhile to have knowledge of it with a view to the goods that are attainable and achievable; for having this as a sort of pattern we shall know better the goods that are good for us, and if we know them shall attain them”.

9 *Eth. nic.* 1097a3–13: “This argument has some plausibility, but seems to clash with the procedure of the sciences; for all of these, though they aim at some good and seek to supply the deficiency of it, leave on one side the knowledge of the good. Yet that all the exponents of the arts should be ignorant of, and should not even seek, so great an aid is not probable. It is hard, too, to see how a weaver or a carpenter will be benefited in regard to his own craft by knowing this ‘good itself’, or how the man who has viewed the Idea itself will be a better



is necessary to know the good (ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἄριστον) in order to understand what we ought to do (as archers who need to look at the target in order to hit it), he seems to raise a question which he will answer in an anti-Platonic way, i.e. by abandoning the universal and synonymous concept of good, and, above all, by limiting his inquiry to the human, practical good.<sup>10</sup>

However, at 1094a18–24 Aristotle is not surely suggesting that in a political community *everyone* has to know the ultimate end and, most importantly, the whole architectonic structure of πράξεις. Rather, we should take Aristotle to believe that the task of *some people* consists exactly in knowing the relationship of priority between the activities that a political community such as the family or the State needs, and the respective ends of these activities.<sup>11</sup> These people perform their task by giving prescriptions, i.e. different and specific tasks to different kinds of people, and by regulating the conduct of the others. As my discussion of salient texts from *Politics* will show, for Aristotle prescribing, ἐπιτάττειν, is not only the proper function of practical reason. It is also a political ἀρχή, together with deliberation and judgement (βουλευέσθαι, κρίνειν), which only some people are able to carry out.<sup>12</sup> More precisely, guiding other people's action is the task of those who exercise either a technical-scientific, or (within the οἶκος) masterly, or political authority. Prescribing a certain line of conduct or sanctioning a rule means, first, knowing the higher end for the sake of which it is appropriate or necessary to adopt this conduct or observe that rule. Secondly, those who give prescriptions view the prescribed acts as the material or efficient causes. Finally, those who give prescriptions grasp the relationship of

---

doctor or general thereby. For a doctor seems not even to study health in this way, but the health of man, or perhaps rather the health of a particular man; for it is individuals that he is healing". These considerations should be also considered in the context, which is the criticism of Platonic Idea of "good itself" (ἀγαθὸν καὶ αὐτό) and the refusal of the universal and univocal concept of goodness. Indeed Aristotle claims, in *Eth. nic.* 1096a20–29, as well as in *Eth. eud.* 1217b26–40, that "good" has as many meanings as the categories.

10 *Eth. nic.* 1096b30–31: "But perhaps these subjects had better be dismissed for the present; for perfect precision about them would be more appropriate to another branch of philosophy".

11 R. Kraut, *Aristotle. Political Philosophy*, cit., 83, importantly insists on the idea that the specific and proper functions of different parts and components of an organism must work together, so that they can serve to some further and higher function beyond them. Such a further and higher *ergon* is that of the whole, for instance the animal, or the political community: "... the good of a human being cannot be equated with the proper functioning of any single part of the body; rather we should expect the human good to consist in something that is supported by all parts of the body working together".

12 See *Polit.* 1299a24; 1326b13–15.

mutual cooperation between practical and productive activities: both practical and productive activities (“It makes no difference ...”) can be the preliminary conditions for certain objectives, and as such they are objects of prescription.

Practical wisdom and politics are both prescriptive, but in different ways. As we saw in the fourth chapter,<sup>13</sup> Aristotle argues that politics, not practical wisdom, is architectonic, because politics has as its end the common human good, for the sake of which it uses other sciences (1094b4: *χρωμένης δὲ ταύτης ταῖς λοιπαῖς τῶν ἐπιστημῶν*). If practical wisdom is not architectonic, this depends on the fact that its end consists precisely in helping the other prescriptive sciences, most notably political science. The end of political science is the good of the State in all of its components;<sup>14</sup> the end of military science is the good of the State only as far as the defence of its borders is concerned—which is why political science is architectonic and prescriptive with respect to military science. Practical wisdom is a key component of both sciences, because it provides the kind of reasoning, i.e. deliberative reasoning, by which they both achieve their goal.

The pre-eminence of politics is also reflected in the use of the verb *διατάσσειν*, at 1094b2, which Aristotle uses to describe the specific directive function of political science.<sup>15</sup> *Διατάσσειν* means to prescribe by assigning their different tasks to different categories of citizens.<sup>16</sup> Politicians do not give detailed rules of conduct, or rules concerning mere execution, such as those that craftsmen, scientists, educators, heads of families, or generals give to their pupils, servants, and subordinates. But while craftsmen, scientists, etc., possess capacities and competencies that enable them to both do something themselves and

13 See *supra* pp. 187–189.

14 See *Eth. nic.* 1094b7–10: “For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a State, that of the State seems at all events something greater and more complete both to attain and to preserve; for though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states. These, then, are the ends at which our inquiry, being concerned with politics, aims.”

15 *Eth. nic.* 1094a28–b2: *Τίνας γὰρ εἶναι χρῶν τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι, καὶ ποίας ἐκάστους μανθάνειν καὶ μέχρι τίνος, αὕτη διατάσσει.*

16 See s.v. in *LSJ*, particularly Herod. I 103, VI 107, Thuc. IV 103, VIII 104, in military situations. See also Plat. *Phaedr.* 271b, *Leg.* 932a. The meaning here employed by Aristotle seems the same as that attested in Herod. I 114: “... he assigned some of them to the building of houses, some to be his bodyguard ... to another he gave the right of bringing him messages; to each he gave his proper work (*διέταξε τοὺς μὲν οἰκίας οἰκοδομεῖν, τοὺς δὲ δορυφόρους εἶναι, τὸν δὲ κοῦ τινα αὐτῶν ὀφθαλμὸν βασιλέος εἶναι, τῷ δὲ τινὶ τὰς ἀγγελίας ἐσφέρειν ἐδίδου γέρας, ὡς ἐκάστῳ ἔργον προστάσων*).” As is clear from this passage, *διατάσσειν* is nearly a synonym of *προστάσσειν* and reveals a prescriptive authority.

prescribe to other people what they have to do, political science prescribes what is incumbent on the different groups and classes of citizens to learn, and *up to what point* they have to learn them (cf. 1094b1: μέχρι τίνος). This claim reminds us of the notion of limit (ὅρος) we found in *Eth. eud.* 1249a21 and *Eth. nic.* 1138b23. Whoever gives orders and practical rules, has a clear picture of the *limit* of the action they order to perform, i.e. of the “mean” by reference to which excess and defect represent a mistake. A doctor, in addition to prescribing a drug, also specifies dosage.

The expression “up to what point” has another important meaning. Aristotle argues that political science determines up to what point each one has to learn, μανθάνειν, the sciences the State needs: “Which (science) each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them” (1094b1–2). What Aristotle means here is that political science defines the field of competence of each category of citizens as well as determining the limits *of their knowledge*, even more than those of their action. This limitation is especially significant for those citizens who exert a prescriptive authority within a particular field of social import. The limit imposed on those who themselves give prescriptions is required by the need for *taxis*, without which it is impossible to achieve the highest *telos*, i.e. the good of the State. All those who give prescriptions of any kind have to prescribe a certain conduct and, at the same time, its limit, the drug and its dosage. It is obvious, then, that politicians, who possess the highest prescriptive authority, should establish (διατάσσειν) who is to learn certain arts and sciences and, most importantly, up to what point. Not only does political science make use of other practical sciences, but it also prevents citizens from exceeding the limits of their field of knowledge.

Finally, we have to pause on the claim that, although there is basically no difference between the end of the individual and that of the State, the latter is nobler and more divine, and therefore must be regarded as the true end of political science (1094b7–10, see note 14). Now, given the way in which Aristotle has described the prescriptive role of political science in the preceding lines, here he cannot be arguing that there is no difference between the individual and the political good; rather, what he means is that the true good of the individual consists in living a citizen's life within a well-governed State. What does Aristotle mean by the words “even if the end is the same for a single man and for a State, that of the State seems at all events something greater and more complete” and “though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states”? He could mean that the individual good coincides with the good of the State. Yet the good of the State does not result from the addition of the good and happiness of the single citizens, but from the order that political science imposes on the different

classes of citizens. The good of the peasant and that of the soldier are the same only from an extremely general point of view, i.e. from the perspective of the architectonic science, which considers the good of both as a condition for the good of the State. In my view, the Aristotelian passages asserting the identity between the individual and the common good suggests that the logic by which political science acts and gives orders is the same as that by which wise people reason, i.e. deliberative logic. Politicians rely on *phronesis* to perform a kind of reasoning that determines what the best means to a certain end is; they distribute to the different classes of citizens and their practical abilities such an instrumental role as wise deliberating subjects attribute to some actions and goods they see as the appropriate means to a certain end.

## 2 The Difference between Action and Production

The distinction between the ends that are separate from the activities needed to achieve them, and the ends coinciding with these activities, is closely connected with the distinction between production and action. When defining *ποίησις*, Aristotle emphasizes that it is always a process leading to something which is different from the process and persists after the process has ceased. This is the case both if the process consists in a series of actions and if it corresponds to a certain kind of knowledge, for knowledge too is an activity that can either coincide with its end, or produce a result distinct from it.<sup>17</sup> In *Eth. nic.* 1139b2–3 Aristotle claims that the product (*ποιητόν*) is an end, though not absolutely, since it is an end “of someone with regard to something (*πρός τι καὶ τινός*)”.<sup>18</sup> What does it mean to say that an end is *πρός τι καὶ τινός*? Aristotle presumably alludes here to the concept of intermediate end, i.e. an end sought not for its own sake but as a means to achieve a further end.<sup>19</sup> But the presence of a relationship (*πρός τι*) and a subjective genitive (*τινός*) provides some more information. The expression *πρός τι* is used to delimit the value and desirability of a certain action with respect to a specific situation; the pronoun *τι*, then, refers not to the further end but the circumstance that makes a particular choice preferable to another. Likewise, the subjective genitive delimits the type of volition, identifying it with the particular volition of a person or a class of people. All this can be linked with the example of practical syllogism in *De*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Eth. eud.* 1216b16–20.

<sup>18</sup> I agree with V. Politis, “Aristotle’s Advocacy of Non-Productive Action”, *Ancient Philosophy*, 18 (1998), 356, and J. Hübner, *art. cit.*, 37, that *τινός* refers to a person and not a thing.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Hübner, *art. cit.*, 42 and 48.

*an.* 434a16–21, where one of the premises consists in the characterization of a subject wishing to achieve a certain goal (“the first premise tells us that such and such a kind of person should do such and such a kind of act, and the second that ... I am a person of the type intended”).

The sentence in *Eth. nic.* 1139b2–3 has great political significance, since it bears out the following thesis, such as it has emerged so far. When deliberating, good rulers take as their starting-point an end, which is the common good; with a view to it, they prescribe certain rules of conduct and certain tasks to the various classes of citizens. From the point of view of political deliberation, these tasks play a similar role to that of intermediate ends in deliberative reasoning. Furthermore, rulers prescribe by instituting a certain order, i.e. by establishing for the different classes of citizens the limits of their competences and actions. Rulers, then, must also take into account, at least in general terms, the different characters and dispositions of the citizens, as Aristotle makes clear in his *Politics*.<sup>20</sup> The prescribed activities are meant as “products” whose achievement contributes to the common good.

The difference between action and production is described in *Eth. nic.* 1140a–b as follows. First, action and production are different because of their genus, and neither is included in the other:

Among things that can be otherwise are included both things made and things done (ἔστι τι καὶ ποιητὸν καὶ πρακτόν); making and acting are different (for their nature we treat even the discussions outside our school as reliable); so that the reasoned state of capacity to act is different from the reasoned state of capacity to make. Nor are they included one in the other; for neither is acting making nor is making acting. Now since building is an art and is essentially a reasoned state of capacity to make, and there is neither any art that is not such a state nor any such state that is not an art, art is identical with a state of capacity to make, involving a true course of reasoning.<sup>21</sup>

20 Cf. for instance, *Polit.* 1326b12–18: “For both governors and governed have duties to perform; the special functions of a governor are to command and to judge (ἄρχοντος δ’ ἐπιτάξεις καὶ κρίσις ἔργον). But if the citizens of a State are to judge and to distribute offices according to merit, then they must know each other’s characters (ἀναγκαῖον γνωρίζειν ἀλλήλους, ποιοὶ τινές εἰσι); where they do not possess this knowledge, both the election to offices and the decision of lawsuits will go wrong”.

21 *Eth. nic.* 1140a1–10: τοῦ δ’ ἐνδεχομένου ἄλλως ἔχειν ἔστι τι καὶ ποιητὸν καὶ πρακτόν· ἕτερον δ’ ἐστὶ ποιήσις καὶ πράξις (πιστεύομεν δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν καὶ τοῖς ἐξωτερικοῖς λόγοις)· ὥστε καὶ ἡ μετὰ λόγου ἔξις πρακτικὴ ἕτερόν ἐστι τῆς μετὰ λόγου ποιητικῆς ἕξεως. διὸ οὐδὲ περιέχεται ὑπ’ ἀλλήλων· οὔτε γὰρ ἡ πράξις ποιήσις οὔτε ἡ ποιήσις πράξις ἐστίν. ἐπεὶ δ’ ἡ οἰκοδομικὴ τέχνη τίς ἐστι

Shortly after, in *Eth. nic.* 1140b2–7, while defining practical wisdom, Aristotle claims:

Practical wisdom cannot be knowledge nor art; not knowledge because that which can be done is capable of being otherwise, not art because action and making are different kinds (ἄλλο τὸ γένος) of thing. It remains, then, that it is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man. For while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action itself is its end.<sup>22</sup>

The distinction between action and production as well as the relationship between production and art, τέχνη, allows us to recall the idea of performance meant as the realization of the main *ergon* of an instrument. Art produces something that is separate from artistic action, but to do so the artist must respect the application of certain rules. If practicing an art well consists in the correct application of given rules, then each production is also *eupragia*, i.e. a *good* performance: the good locksmith makes *effective* tools, the good architect *solid* houses, the good doctor *correct* diagnoses, etc. Being capable of *eupragēin* also in the context of productive activities does not seem to have a further and separate end; and if a producer has been prescribed—that is, required or ordered—to produce something which will serve to a further end, the end in view of which the production has been prescribed will be different from the end of carrying out the production well.

Just as the producer is not primarily motivated by the same end of the person who prescribed the production, so whoever prescribes a certain course of action does not need to possess the necessary art to perform those actions and attain the end. This idea is implied in a passage we have already mentioned, *Eth. eud.* 1227a6–19. Here Aristotle argues for the possibility to deliberate about war, whether or not one possesses military art (καὶ μετὰ τέχνης καὶ ἄνευ τέχνης). Whoever deliberates and makes a choice, considers a certain τέχνη as an auxil-

---

καὶ ὅπερ ἔξις τις μετὰ λόγου ποιητική, καὶ οὐδεμία οὔτε τέχνη ἐστὶν ἥτις οὐ μετὰ λόγου ποιητική ἔξις ἐστίν, οὔτε τοιαύτη ἢ οὐ τέχνη, ταῦτόν ἂν εἴη τέχνη καὶ ἔξις μετὰ λόγου ἀληθοῦς ποιητική. See C.D.C. Reeve, *Aristotle on Practical Wisdom*. Nicomachean Ethics VI, *Translated, with an Introduction, Analysis and Commentary*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA–London 2013, 142–146, on the hierarchical order between practice and production, and M. Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, cit., 47–53.

22 Οὐκ ἂν εἴη ἡ φρόνησις ἐπιστήμη οὐδὲ τέχνη, ἐπιστήμη μὲν ὅτι ἐνδέχεται τὸ πρακτὸν ἄλλως ἔχειν, τέχνη δ' ὅτι ἄλλο τὸ γένος πράξεως καὶ ποιήσεως. λείπεται ἄρα αὐτὴν εἶναι ἔξιν ἀληθῆ μετὰ λόγου πρακτικὴν περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπων ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακά. τῆς μὲν γὰρ ποιήσεως ἕτερον τὸ τέλος, τῆς δὲ πράξεως οὐκ ἂν εἴη· ἐστὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ ἡ εὐπραξία τέλος.

ary productive act, which helps to attain the end. Deliberative and prescriptive capacity derives from the understanding of the actual circumstances in which the actions useful to the end are performed; yet it does not include necessarily the possession of many auxiliary competences. Those who deliberate for or against war are motivated by a political end, i.e. they decide whether waging war is a useful action in order to attain the good of the State. They do not need to know the rules of military science. Military science can be regarded as a *πόλις* because it is auxiliary and “produces” some condition which is useful to an higher end, although it is not a banausic art. We cannot rule out, however, that production too entails deliberation, i.e. that artists too seek the means to realize their products (e.g. they look for the best material for making a certain object). From the point of view of the critical capacity that artists show when deliberating about the means to realize their products, they resemble acting subjects, i.e. *πρακτικοί*, and their making can be compared to action. The fact that both the *praktikos* and the *poietikos* have to deliberate, though for different reasons and prompted by a different volition (the former tending towards something good, the latter towards something effective), can make matters a little more complicated. If there is a kind of “productive” reasoning that precedes the realization of the work, it does not seem to differ much from practical reasoning, although production and action differ because of their genus. The remark in *Eth. nic.* 1140a1–11 that production and action are two rational states that are not included in each other cannot be construed as a classification of sciences. Nor can the difference in genus (at 1140b3–4) between the two states be thoroughly explained by the notion of “good action”:

Reason itself, however, moves nothing, but only the reason which aims at an end and is practical; for this rules the productive reason as well, since everyone who makes, makes for an end and that which is made is not an end in the unqualified sense (but only of someone with regard to something)—only that which is done is that; for good action (*εὐπραξία*) is an end, and desire aims at this.<sup>23</sup>

The key point of this passage lies in the idea that *εὐπραξία* is an end in an absolute sense. Yet it is far from clear that Aristotle is here denying that the performing of *τέχνη* aims at *εὐπραξία* and that production has its own *εὐπραξία*. And such a claim would indeed be odd. If it is true that the *ποιητόν* is separate from *ποιεῖν*, it is also true that producers, i.e. *τεχνίται*, aim at making a good

<sup>23</sup> *Eth. nic.* 1139a35–b4.

product by duly applying the rules of their art. The effectiveness of the product is closely linked with the εὐπραγεῖν of the productive art, whether the product consists in an object used to produce something else (e.g. a musical instrument or a shuttle) or resides in the quality of the result of the art (e.g. the full recovery from a disease). The very fact that τεχνῖται have at their disposal tools for production means that they use them in a correct way and with varying degrees of ability. From this point of view, τεχνῖται too have their own ἔργον κυριώτερον, just as lifeless instruments do. If the main work of the gimlet is boring, the main work of producers will consist in being able to apply the rules of their art.

From another point of view, a practical activity that attains its end while being performed can also be an auxiliary activity, since it helps to achieve a higher end, with regard to which it can be compared to a production. To give an example, an activity of checking and supervision attains its end while it is being performed, yet it also makes possible the performing of other activities, e.g. the celebration of a ceremony. The operation of checking is, in itself, a praxis, but it is also a production, though not by its nature, as it helps to attain an end, i.e. the celebration of a ceremony, which is separate and distinct from the activity of supervision and checking. I am not claiming that the distinction between action and production is blurred. Rather, I wish to emphasize that the difference of their genera does not entail, as would seem to be the case *prima facie*, a distinction within two classes of activities and sciences (actions *vs* productions). For nearly every activity can contribute to an end which is different in essence from the performed activity: in its essence, health is not identical with diagnosis; in the same way, performing a piece of music is not, strictly speaking, the same as playing a musical instrument. A diagnosis and the performing a piece of music are applications of rules of art allowing one to achieve under different circumstances results which are similar but not identical (the recovery from this or that disease, the performing of this or that piece). Both activities must be εὐπραγίαι, i.e., done well. The difference in genus between action and production may be interpreted in the light of the difference between end and means: when we deliberate about a course of action useful for a certain end, every intermediate act between the deliberating subject and the ultimate end may be regarded as a “production”, as aimed at a further and separate end.

All of this Aristotle makes clear already at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the *ergon* of man. For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a



*ergon* or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the *ergon*, so would it seem to be for human beings, if they have a *ergon*. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain *erga* or activities, and have human beings none? Are they naturally 'functionless'? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a *ergon*, may one lay it down that human beings similarly have a *ergon* apart from all these?<sup>24</sup>

This passage provides a lot of information about the issues we are dealing with, and deserves close examination. In the section that comes before these lines, Aristotle has raised the question of the definition of the good. After claiming that the term "good" has as many meanings as there are categories (1096a20–29), and after rejecting the existence of the idea and the universal concept of good as well as of the "good in itself", he once again asks the question about the meaning of "good", and emphasizes that this notion cannot be the same in every kind of action and art:

Let us again return to the good we are seeking, and ask what it can be. It seems different in different actions and arts (ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῃ πράξει καὶ τέχνῃ); it is different in medicine, in strategy, and in the other arts likewise. What then is the good of each? Surely that for whose sake everything else is done (οὗ χάριν τὰ λοιπὰ πράττεται). In medicine this is health, in strategy victory, in architecture a house, in any other sphere something else, and in every action and choice the end; for it is for the sake of this that all people do whatever else they do. Therefore, if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good achievable by action, and if there are more than one, these will be the goods achievable by action.<sup>25</sup>

What Aristotle is claiming here is that every field of action will have its own good. In addition, he argues that that for the sake of which everything else is done, is always a good. Wherever there is action, the end is a good. In all the examples cited, the end is something distinct and separate from the activities. This may be a consequence of the examples chosen: medicine, architecture and strategy are often quoted as examples of activities whose end or *ergon* are different from curing, building, etc., by contrast with other activities whose *ergon* coincides with action. However, as we learned above, productive activities too can be evaluated by the standard of the quality of what they produce:

<sup>24</sup> *Eth. nic.* 1097b22–34.

<sup>25</sup> *Eth. nic.* 1097a14–23.

we can say that their end is not just a product, but also a *good* product. In the text quoted above, Aristotle uses the word *πρᾶξις* and the verb *πράττειν* also in the context of some productive activities. In b22–34 he gives some examples of activities, e.g. vision, flute-making, and sculpture, to argue that the good for both practical and productive activities consists in their *ἔργον* and in *τὸ εἶναι*, i.e. in “doing well”. His aim here is to show that for human beings the practical good consists in using reason. Consequently, if there is an *ἔργον* and an *εἶναι* for the carpenter and the cobbler, human beings as such must *a fortiori* have their own good, which must reside in an activity other than those performed by the parts of their body. It is no coincidence that, to explain that the *ergon* of human beings resides in the use of reason and not in other bodily faculties, Aristotle quotes the *ergon* of the eye, i.e. the example he uses to illustrate the case of an *ergon* coinciding with use.

The two last passages that I have quoted seem to me to confirm that the notion of *εὐπραγία* is relevant to a productive activity when the latter is viewed as an application of the rules of an art. For Aristotle, however, the distinction between action and production can also be construed as a distinction in species. He deals with this kind of distinction in *Polit.* 1254a1–8:

The instruments commonly so called are instruments of production, whilst a possession is an instrument of action. From a shuttle we get something else besides the use of it, whereas of a garment or of a bed there is only the use. Further, as production and action are different in species (*εἴδει*), and both require instruments, the instruments which they employ must likewise differ in species.

In the context in which this passage occurs, Aristotle is discussing the concepts of domestic property and good management of the household. To do this, he evokes of the concepts of instrument (*ὄργανον*), use (*χρήσις*), function, and possession (*κτῆμα*). Instruments can be lifeless, such as the tools of a craftsman, or living, such as slaves. They are used to produce things. By contrast, a possession is something which is used but does not produce anything other than itself. A shuttle is a productive instrument because it is used to make cloth; a dress is a possession because it is not used to make another object and its *ergon* consists in the use we make of it when we wear it. Therefore, in order to both produce and act, we need objects in which the difference between production and action, i.e. a specific difference, is reflected. Interestingly enough, the specific difference between production and action seems to coincide with the reason that Aristotle adduces in *Eth. nic.* 1140a1–11 to explain the concept of difference in genus. Did he change his mind as to the relationship between

production and action, whether they are two distinct genera or two species of the same genus? I do not believe that Aristotle changed his mind. Rather, when it comes to showing that action and production are two distinct ways of construing the end, the specific difference is more convenient than the generic one. The end is viewed as the genus comprising a “product” and a “good performance”. This allows us to regard an activity both as an action, i.e. a correct application of the rules, and a production, i.e. the realization of some object or of an auxiliary condition (i.e. a condition promoting a further end).<sup>26</sup>

### 3 The Relationship of Prescription with Use and Possession

The difference between action and production is essential for understanding the difference between what Aristotle in his *Politics* terms “instruments of use” and “instruments of possession”. For Aristotle an instrument is any means, whether living or inanimate, that helps to achieve an end. This includes human beings, both slaves and freemen. The distinctions among the concepts of action, production, function, use, and possession, which we already met with in the ethical treatises, are also used in the *Politics* in order to clarify the relationships obtaining within the structure of the State. At the beginning of his *Politics* Aristotle focuses on the notion of common good. He argues that every community (πᾶσα κοινωνία) is established with a view to some good. We can speak of a community—a family, a society, a State—when its members perform different actions with a view to what they all regard as a good:

Every State is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the State or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> A different, though interesting, perspective about the *ergon* of actions and productions is that advanced by A. Rosler, *Political Authority and Obligation in Aristotle*, cit., 64: “Aristotle may be taken to be saying something like this: just as we do with artists and their crafts, let us first identify what it is that marks out their craft without posing any evaluative question, and only *then* go into the evaluative business of saying who is doing a good job at it. Let us first see *what* they are doing, and only then see *how* they are doing”.

<sup>27</sup> *Polit.* 1252a1–7.

This passage confirms that political science is architectonic. By comparison with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, however, at the beginning of the *Politics* Aristotle shows a stronger interest in the topic of authority. This is because he wishes to speak not only of the State, but also of minor forms of community included in the State. Each of these communities is characterized by its own end, and thus its specific good, while also being part of a wider structure aiming at the attainment of the highest good. Within this framework, the notion of prescription is significant because every kind of community has a guide, i.e. someone who knows the good end of the community they have to lead. Consequently, there exists a hierarchical order of the ends and of the communities acting with a view to their respective ends, as well as of the figures representing authority within each kind of community. The difference between the various degrees of authority is a specific, not a quantitative one:

Some people think that the qualifications of a statesman, king, householder, and master are the same, and that they differ, not in kind, but only in the number of their subjects. For example, the ruler over a few is called a master; over more, the manager of a household; over a still larger number, a statesman or king, as if there were no difference between a great household and a small state. The distinction which is made between the king and the statesman is as follows: when the government is personal, the ruler is a king; when, according to the rules of the political science, the citizens rule and are ruled in turn, then he is called a statesman. But all this is a mistake, as will be evident to anyone who considers the matter according to the method which has hitherto guided us. As in other departments of science, so in politics, the compound should always be resolved into the simple elements or least parts of the whole. We must therefore look at the elements of which the state is composed, in order that we may see in what the different kinds of rule differ from one another, and whether any scientific result can be attained about each one of them.<sup>28</sup>

These remarks are directed against Plato, who in *Pol.* 259a–c argues for the existence of a single political science common to both the head of the household and the head of the State. “Royal science”, as Plato has it, is the science of the “true king”. Private citizens may possess it if they are able to give advice to the people in charge: as a result, there will be no difference between those who manage a large household and those who rule a small State, since royal science

---

28 *Polit.* 1252a7–22.

is the same, whether it is *politike* or *oikonomike*.<sup>29</sup> On the contrary, in Aristotle's view there exists a difference in species similar to that between action and production.

Before discussing the relationship between the different degrees of authority, we have to focus on the way Aristotle, while dealing with household management, describes the notion of *use* and its meaning with regard to the concept of possession:

Property is a part of the household, and the art of acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household; for no one can live well, or indeed live at all, unless they are provided with necessities. And as in the arts which have a definite sphere the workers must have their own proper instruments for the accomplishment of their work, so it is in the management of a household. Now instruments are of various sorts; some are living, other lifeless; in the rudder, the pilot of a ship has a lifeless, in the lookout man, a living instrument; for in the arts the servant is a kind of instrument. Thus, too, a possession is an instrument for maintaining life. And so, in the arrangement of the family, a slave is a living possession, and property a number of such instruments; and the servant is himself an instrument for instruments. For if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus ... if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters. Now the instruments commonly so called are instruments of production, whilst a possession is an instrument of action. From a shuttle we get something else besides the use of it, whereas of a garment or of a bed there is only the use. Further, as production and action are different in species, and both require instruments, the instruments which they employ must likewise differ in species. But life is action and not production, and therefore the slave is the minister of action.<sup>30</sup>

This text deserves close scrutiny. Aristotle is about to illustrate the notion of ὄργανον. The first fundamental clarification is that instruments can be inani-

29 See Plat. *Pol.* 259c1–3: “It’s clear that there is one sort of expert knowledge (ἐπιστήμη μία), concerned with all things; whether someone gives this the name of expertise in kingship, or statesmanship, or household management (εἴτε βασιλικὴν εἴτε πολιτικὴν εἴτε οἰκονομικήν), let’s not pick any quarrel with him”. On this disagreement, see K.M. Cherry, *Plato, Aristotle and the Purpose of Politics*, CUP, Cambridge 2012.

30 *Polit.* 1253b23–1254a8.

mate or animate. Inanimate instruments are generally provided by a productive art, which makes them in order that they can be used to perform certain activities and sometimes make other products (a shuttle makes cloth, and cloth is used to make a dress). Inanimate instruments, then, immediately reveal the auxiliary function of the art that has produced them. The notion of animate instrument is more interesting, since it comprises not simply functions which are clearly menial (i.e. the manual tasks that Aristotle views as pertaining to slaves), but also auxiliary functions and tasks entailing a critical capacity and knowledge. These auxiliary tasks can in turn include a certain amount of authority: those who play auxiliary roles need the auxiliary activities performed by those who are in an even more subordinate position. Within such a hierarchical order, a single person has to observe a received prescription and in turn give a prescription to someone else. Aristotle gives two examples of animate instrument, i.e. the lookout man and the slave, and offers a pretty complex distinction of species. First, both the animate and the inanimate instrument belong to the same species, if considered from the point of view of the use that those who have to achieve a certain end through them make of them: for example, for the commander of a ship both the rudder and the lookout man are instruments, which he uses for a single end, i.e. navigating. The same species is divided by the distinction of animate and inanimate. Similarly, an object is an inanimate instrument when it is used by its owner for the necessities of life (e.g. a house which is inhabited or a dress which is worn); a slave is also an object used by the master for the necessities of life, and therefore it is an instrument, though an animate one. Aristotle argues that those who serve in whatever form are instruments, or rather, they belong to the species of instruments; this species includes human beings, both slaves and freemen.<sup>31</sup>

The distinction between slaves and freemen is not without consequences. This is so for a number of reasons. In the case of slaves, those who use them must demonstrate the ability to make a good use of them, as of any other object they own, e.g. a house. For it is use, not simple possession, that makes for the good owner. But the “use” of a freeman is more significant, because the services provided by someone who is not owned can vary a lot, according to the position that those who use and those who are used occupy within the hierarchical order. In addition, those who make use of freemen also do so not for their own benefit, but in order to attain a common good. Moreover, those who have

---

31 On Aristotle's treatment of slavery, see P. Pellegrin, *L'excellence menacée. Sur la philosophie politique d'Aristote*, Classiques Garnier, Paris 2017, 133–160.

at their disposal freemen as instruments, may in turn be living instruments of someone who has a higher position than themselves. This is the case of the cavalryman. Since he uses the harness to ride, somehow he also uses those who make the harness; yet he rides in order to serve in an army, and therefore his activity is subordinate to a military authority. The political aspect of the use of freemen is obviously the most interesting, for in the political domain use concerns human beings who are not only free but also equal. This means that making use of freemen is a *temporary* prescriptive authority, since those who rule either were ruled or could be ruled again, and the prescriptive role alternates with the auxiliary one.

*Polit.* 1253b23–1254a8, quoted above, is particularly significant because of its link with prescription. Aristotle claims that instruments are instruments because they exist in order to realize a certain *ergon*. To realize their *ergon* they have to be used. If an instrument could perform its function by itself; if, “obeying or anticipating the will of others”, that is, *when ordered to do so*, a shuttle weaved or a plectrum plucked the strings, nobody playing a guiding role would need workmen nor would masters need slaves. This remark might seem obvious and therefore superfluous in the case of inanimate instruments such as those mentioned by Aristotle (i.e. the shuttle and the plectrum). Yet if Aristotle feels the need to make this point, it is because he thinks it necessary to divide the function of use into two distinct moments, each belonging to a different level of the architectonical order of practical sciences. There is the use of those who formulate and give rules of conduct to other people; and the use of those who implement the rules. These two forms of *chresis* are always distinct, although they can occasionally be both present in a single person (as is the case of a doctor who prescribes a drug through an assistant, though he can administer it himself, if need be). As Aristotle points out with his apparently obvious claim, an executor is needed since a lifeless instrument cannot itself carry out the function for which it has been made: shuttles do not weave nor do plectra pluck the strings. However, the remark that an executor is needed who can, first, use a productive instrument and, second, use it *when ordered to do so*, is far from obvious. It highlights the structure of a complex system of activities, which we have previously termed hierarchical and cooperative. Consequently, living instruments are those who perform the work and also implement rules that they did not formulate themselves, but often have to apply when and how they are ordered to. The difference between a lifeless and a living instrument lies in the fact that the former is just an instrument, designed either to be used or to produce further instruments; while the latter is an auxiliary and is able to receive, understand and implement a prescription. As a result, there are productive instruments (*ὄργανα ποιητικά*), which are made by a productive art such

as the manufacture of wooden tools, and are used by another art, e.g. weaving, in order to produce something else; and there is the possession, which Aristotle calls *πρακτικόν*, of a product that is only used, as is the case of a dress we just have to wear. The difference in species between production and action is thus reflected in the instruments.

In addition to this, Aristotle clarifies the distinction between productive and non-productive use, the latter corresponding to mere possession. Since in this context he is committed to defining the status of slaves, he claims that a slave is a living instrument capable of receiving a prescription, like a living instrument which is *not* a possession, e.g. the lookout man. However, since a slave is a possession used by its master for the necessities of life, and since life is action, not production, a slave is a possession used as an instrument for action. In other words, a slave is like a dress, not a shuttle. We could raise an objection here: a living instrument is characterized by the fact that it is able not only to receive a prescription, but also to carry out the received prescription; in so doing, it can produce something separate from the activity it has been ordered to perform. A slave then, like any auxiliary capable of understanding an order, can e.g. weave a dress. Of a dress we can only make a proper use, i.e. wear it; of the slave who weaved it, however, a use has been made that is apparently more similar to that of a shuttle, i.e. an apparently productive use.

Aristotle is concerned to define the concept of use with respect to the various forms of authority, and to distinguish the authority of a master from political authority. Therefore, when he claims that a slave is an instrument for action, not production, he is not denying that the slave is able to perform a number of productive tasks; rather, he is referring to the action of the master, i.e. of the owner of goods.<sup>32</sup> A sensible owner of goods has to put them to good use. Such a use of goods by their owner is regarded by Aristotle as an action that has its end in itself. For example: if a master orders his slave to prepare a meal and the slave carries out the order, we may say that the meal is produced by the slave. From the standpoint of the action of the master and of the use he makes of his possessions, including his slaves, having the meal prepared by the slave is not distinct from the use of the slave, just as there is no difference between wearing a dress and possessing it with a view to wearing it. For a good master, to use one's slaves in an appropriate and sagacious way amounts simply to eating one's meals regularly, having a clean and well-heated house, a tidy wardrobe, and so on. The products produced by slaves reveal the *eupragein* of masters.

---

32 See P. Pellegrin, *op. cit.*, 139 f.



When claiming that a slave is a *κτῆμα πρακτικόν* Aristotle means that prescribing to slaves is the *energeia* of masters, i.e. their main *ergon*.

The prescription a master gives to his slave is similar to, albeit not identical with, the prescription an architect gives to a bricklayer (though the latter can be someone's slave). An architect, as such, gives prescriptions and presides over their proper implementation, since his end is the realization of a product, i.e. the house, to which the bricklayer contributes as an auxiliary. The same could seem to hold for the action of the commander giving prescriptions to the look-out man, for his goal is navigation, i.e. a *praxis*, not a production. However, the role played by the commander is different from that of the master of slaves. To the commander his subordinate is a living and, at least to some extent, a productive instrument, for he performs a task that helps to attain an end, i.e. navigation, which is not an individual good of the commander—just as a house is not an individual good of the architect.

The distinction between the use of what we possess and the use of what we exert an authority on but do not possess, is crucial:

For some duties are of the more necessary, others are of the more honourable sort ... all such branches of knowledge are servile. There is likewise a science of the master, which teaches the use of slaves; for the master as such is concerned, not with the acquisition, but with the use of them. Yet this science is not anything great or wonderful; for the master need *only know how to prescribe* that which the slave must know how to execute.<sup>33</sup>

The master, then, has only to be able to prescribe (*ἐπίστασθαι ἐπιτάττειν*) the performing of such tasks as are useful to life, but does not need to be able to carry out these tasks himself. As far as prescription and execution in the scientific and technical domain are concerned, things are quite different. In the technical domain prescription seems to entail a deeper knowledge of the rules of execution, even if these rules, as an object of prescription, are obviously not implemented by those who give the prescription, but by those who receive it. In the field of science and technical capacities prescription entails a deeper knowledge of the material conditions and the efficient causes for achieving the goal, as is shown by the fact that those who need an object to realize their *ergon* but are unable to produce it themselves, turn to the suitable producer: the cavalryman to the farrier or the saddler, the musician to the flute-maker. On the

---

33 *Polit.* 1255b28–35.

relationship between use and the production of what is needed for use we are informed by the following passage:

The first question is whether the art of getting wealth (χρηματιστική) is the same as the art of managing a household (οικονομική) or a part of it, or instrumental to it; and if the last, whether in the way that the art of making shuttles is instrumental to the art of weaving, or in the way that the casting of bronze is instrumental to the art of the statuary, for they are not instrumental in the same way, but the one provides tools and the other material ... now it is easy to see that the art of household management is not identical with the art of getting wealth, for the one uses the material which the other provides. For the art which uses household stores can be no other than the art of household management.<sup>34</sup>

What is novel here is the fact that, although we are within the domain of οἰκονομική and the tasks of the master of a household, Aristotle does not refer to the use by the master of such instruments for action as the slaves, but to his use of products provided by auxiliary arts which may well be carried out by freemen. Those who exercise these auxiliary arts as free workers, not as slaves, are given prescriptions in a different way. The art of getting wealth, then, is itself auxiliary and subordinate to οἰκονομική, but it can be represented by producers who are not possessions (κτήματα) of the master of the household. The producers may well be free men having as their main end and *ergon* the realization of their product, not just the good of those who use their product. To put it differently: whereas a slave, whatever its abilities and tasks, is like a dress one wears, i.e. is an instrument whose only goal is the use one can make of it, a free producer or worker, e.g. a craftsman or a lookout man, is similar to a shuttle, which is used for an activity that will produce something distinct and a good useful to someone else (a fabric for making dresses or a manoeuvre useful for the route). Therefore, the function of a slave coincides with its service to its master, whereas other production is part of a “chain” of arts.

This being so, it is easier to understand the auxiliary and the prescriptive role of an art if we consider it within a social and political structure, rather than by itself. But the exercise of the prescriptive authority of a certain art with respect to a subordinate art, rather than absolutely, raises some problems. For even if a weaver can “prescribe” a carpenter to make a shuttle, or a cavalryman can “prescribe” a saddler to make a harness, i.e. even if those who use a

---

34 *Polit.* 1256a3–13.

certain instrument can ask for and demand its production according to such standards as are set by the rules of use, and even if it is just as clear that in such cases an art is auxiliary and subordinate because it produces, and prescriptive and higher because it uses, things are quite different in other cases, especially when it comes to arts and activities requiring superior and complex competencies:

And we have found the answer to our original question 'Whether the art of getting wealth is the business of the manager of a household and of the statesman or not their business?' viz. that wealth is presupposed by them ... at this stage begins the duty of the manager of a household, who has to order the things which nature supplies—he may be compared to the weaver who has not to make but to use wool, and to know, too, what sort of wool is good and serviceable or bad and unserviceable. Were this otherwise, it would be difficult to see why the art of getting wealth is a part of the management of a household and the art of medicine not; for surely the members of a household must have health just as they must have life or any other necessity. The answer is that as from one point of view the master of the house and the ruler of the State have to consider about health, from another point of view not they but the physician has to; so in one way the art of household management, in another way the subordinate art, has to consider about wealth.<sup>35</sup>

Some productions are only made possible by deep scientific knowledge and extremely complex rules of execution. This raises a problem as to both the correct assessment of the product—i.e. whether it is well made and up to the required standard of εὐπραγία; and its correct use. This problem is crucial, since it concerns not only the management of a household or small associations, but also the very choice of magistrates:

It might be objected that he who can judge of the healing of a sick man would be one who could himself heal his disease, and make him whole—that is, in other words, the physician; and so in all professions and arts. As, then, the physician ought to be called to account by physicians, so ought men in general to be called to account by their peers ...<sup>36</sup>

---

35 *Polit.* 1258a20–35.

36 *Polit.* 1281b40–1282a3.

Moreover, there are some arts whose products are not judged of solely, or best, by the artists themselves, namely those arts whose products are recognized even by those who do not possess the art; for example, the knowledge of the house is not limited to the builder only; the user, or, in other words, the master, of the house will actually be a better judge than the builder, just as the pilot will judge better of a rudder than the carpenter, and the guest will judge better of a feast than the cook.<sup>37</sup>

The second passage has to be placed within its context. Aristotle is discussing the democratic constitution, where not the best, but “the multitude is sovereign” (κύριον τὸ πλῆθος, 1281a40).<sup>38</sup> He seems to appreciate this constitution since the many, although they are not excellent if considered separately, if taken together can be better, because each of them contributes his own virtue and practical wisdom to political deliberation. This makes for a collective and therefore a better overall judgement, just as the unanimous judgement of the many on a work of art is better than the conflicting judgements of the competent few. Aristotle is here evoking an argument that had been used by Plato to attack democracy: only the competent can judge whether or not something is well done, and democracy’s defect is that it does not give power only to the competent.<sup>39</sup> Aristotle does not totally reject the argument based upon the possession of science, for he appreciates the practical value of technical and scientific knowledge and largely uses craft analogies. However, it seems to me that he wants to correct (and support) it, by the following thesis: the quality of an object that is used will be judged by both those who know its formal, material

37 1282a16–23.

38 1281a40–b7: “The principle that the multitude ought to be in power rather than the few best might seem to be solved and to contain some difficulty and perhaps even truth. For the many, of whom each individual is not a good man, when they meet together may be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and practical wisdom, and when they meet together, just as they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses, so too with regards to their character and thought. Hence the many are better judges than a single man of music and poetry ...”. The political implications of this remark have been recently debated by M. Lane, “Claims to Rule: the Case of the Multitude”, in M. Deslauriers-P. Destrée (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Politics*, cit., 247–274, esp. 254 f., C. Bobonich, “Aristotle, Political Decision Making, and the Many”, in T. Lockwood-T. Samaras (eds.), *Aristotle’s Politics*, cit., 142–162, esp. 143–148, and J. Terrel, *La Politique d’Aristote. La démocratie à l’épreuve de la division sociale*, Vrin, Paris 2015, 115–129.

39 Cf. for instance Plat. *Protag.* 319a–320c; *Pol.* 297b–c; *Leg.* 757a–d.

and efficient causes, and those who know its final cause or, more precisely, the end for the sake of which it is used. Therefore, it is an architect who will judge whether a house is good, if the judgement concerns the correct implementation of the rules of execution, for the house must be up to the requirements depending on principles that all reside in the architect's soul (i.e. the "form" of the house, the knowledge of the materials, and the efficient principle presiding over the building project). However, the house must also satisfy the goal that those who will live in it set themselves. It is important to notice that the goal of those who use something is different from the goal of those who produce it. The goal of those who produce something coincides with the form and realizes it; the goal of those who use something is not the form, but a purpose of a quite different kind. Those who use a house, aim at sheltering themselves; those who produce it, aim at building it. This thesis may seem fairly clear from the point of view of *krisis*, but it turns out to be more complex from the point of view of prescription, as is shown by Aristotle's example in *Polit.* 1258a20 ff. Who has to care for health within a house (or, we might also say, within the State): the doctor or the master of the household (or the political leader)? For health is the goal of the doctor, but it is also, albeit in a different sense, the goal of those who lead a family and, more generally, hold some kind of authority (τοῦ οἰκονόμου καὶ τοῦ ἀρχοντος καὶ περὶ ὑγείας ἰδεῖν, 1258a31–32).<sup>40</sup> As a matter of fact, Aristotle claims that both are to be granted a prescriptive authority for the same reason that enables both of them to judge. And the reason is that it is those who know the causes. Consequently, only the doctor will be able to prescribe a treatment and cure the patient, and provide the general directions for preventing a disease, since he knows the causes of both the onset of the disease and the recovery of health, that is, the material and efficient causes of health. Yet for the head of the household and the head of the State preserving health is an intermediate goal, i.e. a condition for the well-being and happiness of the *oikos* and the *polis*. They know the final cause of health, that for the sake of which health is worth of pursuing. The *oikonomos* and the *archon* regard it as a means to a further end, just as the weaver uses the shuttle and the commander the lookout man. The doctor, then, plays the role of an auxiliary who is given prescriptions for a political end, i.e. for the common good. By contrast, when it comes to his own field of competence, the doctor will give prescriptions to patients.

<sup>40</sup> The broad context is about the role of chrematistic, which is not, according to Aristotle, a function proper to the master of house and political ruler. Once the material goods are provided, the task of *oikonomos* and *archon* is to dispose them for the best, cf. *Polit.* 1258a24–34.

#### 4 Prescriptive Wisdom and True Opinion

In the previous paragraph I tried to show that nearly every activity, if placed within the context of a social and political body and a hierarchical order of ends, is productive and auxiliary, since by either producing something or being performed it helps bring about an end other than its own *ergon*. Sometimes, however, it is also prescriptive, because it is higher than the activity or art that gives it the instruments it will use to attain its end, i.e. its *ergon*. The political meaning of this double role lies in the fact that the hierarchical order of ends makes the whole social body and the system of activities extremely close-knit. Most citizens perform a double *ergon* or rather, they perform an *ergon* requiring them to be able to both obey and give prescriptions.<sup>41</sup> This twofold role is best expressed in the virtue of the citizen, for a free citizen knows how to obey but learns how to rule. The fact that each member of the State, being a free man, must be able to rule and be ruled<sup>42</sup> differentiates the virtue of the *polis* from that of the *oikos*, since the ruled citizen is not ruled like a slave or a servant, and the ruling citizen does not rule like the master of the household:

It may be argued that men are praised for knowing both how to rule and how to obey, and he is said to be a citizen of virtue who is able to do both well. Now if we suppose the virtue of a good man to be that which rules, and the virtue of the citizen to include ruling and obeying, it cannot be said that they are equally worthy of praise. Since, then, it is sometimes thought that the ruler and the ruled must learn different things and not the same, but that the citizen must know and share in them both, the inference is obvious. There is, indeed, the rule of a master, which is concerned with menial offices—the master need not know how to perform these, but may employ others in the execution of them: the other would be degrading ... But there is a rule of another kind, which is exercised over freemen and equals by birth—a constitutional rule, which the ruler must learn by obeying, as he would learn the duties of a general of cavalry by being under the orders of a general of cavalry, or the duties of a general

<sup>41</sup> See *Polit.* 1277a5–12. On this text, see R. Kraut, *Aristotle. Political Philosophy*, cit., 366 f.

<sup>42</sup> On the central importance of rotation in office (to which precisely corresponds the idea of the alternation in the exercise of the government, which in turn wants learning to rule and to be ruled for freemen), both in Plato's and Aristotle's political thought, see G. Cambiano, *Come nave in tempesta. Il governo della città in Platone e Aristotele*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2016.

of infantry by being under the orders of a general of infantry, and by having had the command of a regiment and of a company. It has been well said that he who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.<sup>43</sup>

In the first half of this passage, Aristotle claims once again that the authority of the master never entails the ability to perform such tasks as are the object of an order. In the second part, Aristotle illustrates the first difference between political authority and the authority of the master. Being exercised over free men, political authority is more similar to the one of the commander of a ship: a free person receiving an order or being prescribed to perform a task in accord with his own *ergon*, is not just a living instrument for action, i.e. an instrument for the action of the person who gave him the prescription (the ὄργανον πρακτικόν of *Polit.* 1254a2 and 16–17). Rather, the free auxiliary is an instrument for production (ὄργανον ποιητικόν, *ibid.*), since they either produce something that someone else can make use of or, by carrying out a certain auxiliary function, prepare the ground for the performing of further functions. In a passage I quoted in the previous paragraph, Aristotle used the image of shuttles and plectra, which are unable to weave and pluck the lyre by themselves, in order to prove the necessity of someone who uses inanimate instruments in the proper way, in compliance with the order to do so. In case of the political authority exercised over free men, those who give prescriptions should know both the end for the sake of which they give prescriptions, and the means, i.e. the action prescribed (though not necessarily the way to perform it). The authority to prescribe a certain action depends on the knowledge of the causal link (whether material or efficient) connecting the prescribed action to the end for the sake of which it is prescribed. It does not depend, or it does only to an extremely limited and secondary extent, on the possession of the productive capacity possessed by those who receive the prescription.

Aristotle's justification of political and social hierarchy, therefore, may lie in the following view: the authority exercised over freemen unfolds, at least ideally, through different stages, according to the rational model of deliberative reasoning moving backwards (if such is the end, then this is the means, i.e. the preliminary condition to be satisfied, etc.). Consequently, each of these stages (except the lowest ones, such as slaves, servants, apprentices), represents a share of prescriptive authority, which corresponds to a particular position within the architectonic arrangement of the ends. According to this model, the

---

43 1277a25–b12.

same activity is auxiliary with respect to the one for the sake of which it is performed, while also being the end for its subordinate. Aristotle's examples, i.e. the commander of the ship, the lookout man, the chorus-leader, the *parastates*, the *taxiarchos*, and the *lochagos*, confirm that the authority exercised within a political structure is based on the means-end relationship, just like deliberative reasoning.

At 1277a25–b12, Aristotle explains the second difference between political authority and other forms of authority: political authority is exercised over men who are not only free, but also equal. Equal birth requires that authority fulfills another requirement, the presence of practical wisdom:

Practical wisdom is the only virtue peculiar to the ruler: it would seem that all other virtues must equally belong to ruler and subject. The virtue of the subject is certainly not practical wisdom, but only true opinion; he may be compared to the maker of the flute, while his master is like the flute-player or user of the flute.<sup>44</sup>

In these lines, Aristotle provides an interesting description of practical wisdom as the only intellectual virtue peculiar to authority. He is probably implying that practical wisdom is the only intellectual virtue having a general prescriptive nature, and that this is necessarily reflected in the political domain. The comparison with *technē* confirms Aristotle's previous discussion of the relationship between prescriptive authority, production and use: the flute-player using the flute has a sort of prescriptive "authority" coming from his knowledge of the higher end of flute-making; the possession of the higher end reveals itself in the *ergon* of playing the flute, not in the ability to make it. However—and this is where the metaphor of the productive art shows an important characteristic concerning the equality between the rulers and the ruled—, Aristotle arguably thought that the flute-player must know, at least broadly, how the flute is made, and that the flute-maker must have a smattering of music. In other words, there

44 1277b25–32: ἡ δὲ φρόνησις ἄρχοντος ἴδιος ἀρετὴ μόνη. τὰς γὰρ ἄλλας ἔοικεν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι κοινὰς καὶ τῶν ἀρχομένων καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων, ἀρχομένου δὲ γε οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρετὴ φρόνησις, ἀλλὰ δόξα ἀληθής· ὥσπερ αὐλοποιὸς γὰρ ὁ ἀρχόμενος, ὁ δ' ἄρχων αὐλητὴς ὁ χρώμενος. The content of this passage recalls Plat. *Resp.* 601d–602a, as I pointed out at ch. 1, p. 47. Aristotle's dependency on Plato, however, is weaker than it appears. Aristotle, though reminding Platonic distinction between the knowledge of use as typical of prescribers, and right opinion (ὀρθὴ δόξα) as proper to executors, is focusing on practical wisdom as political virtue and excellence of rulers. Political virtue, as excellence of rulers, is not knowledge of use, but knowledge of final causes *together* with critical ability to assess the particular circumstances. Aristotle's true (ἀληθής) opinion, therefore, is more than right opinion which Plato speaks of.



is arguably a certain *contiguity* of knowledge between a prescription and the performing of the prescribed action. As a result, those who give prescriptions to their immediate subordinates know to some extent the rules of the productive art presiding over the production of what they prescribed. Similarly, those who carry out the prescription know the immediate end for the sake of which they have been given that prescription.<sup>45</sup> (By contrast, the lesser the contiguity between the order and its execution, the lesser the sharing of knowledge: those who hold a high authority know little or nothing about the lower tasks, useful as they are to the common good, since they have probably always ignored how to perform them; likewise, those who carry out such tasks have little knowledge of the common good and of the causal link of their tasks with the common good.)

The view that there is a certain contiguity of competencies between those who give prescriptions and those who carry them out, though Aristotle does not express it explicitly, is the presupposition for the appearance of “true opinion”. What does it mean that the ruled have to possess not practical wisdom but only true opinion? It means that for Aristotle not all those who are ruled are ignorant of the ultimate end for the sake of which they operate in a subordinate position. Some of the ruled, i.e. all or most of those who are by birth equal to the rulers, have a true opinion about the ultimate end, i.e. the common good. This true opinion differs from practical wisdom for a number of reasons. First, the opinion Aristotle refers to in this context is a normative proposition expressing the desirability of the highest good, i.e. the good of the State, and of some other goods which are instrumental in realizing the good of the State (e.g. the desirability of good household management, of moderate wealth, of the education of the young, and so on). These opinions may help build up a moral habit, i.e. the character of the citizen, but in themselves do not represent a kind of reasoning that aims at making specific choices. Practical wisdom, on the contrary, is the intellectual virtue enabling one to deliberate about particulars and give right prescriptions according to the circumstances. Besides, not only does it give prescriptions, it also indicates the good reasons for a prescription. Consequently—and this is the second reason why true opinion differs from practical wisdom—the normative opinions concerning the desirability of some goods which are to be regarded as instrumental in realizing the ultimate end (i.e. the opinions concerning the desirability of wealth and education as means for the good of the State) do not *technically* derive from deliberative

---

45 See C. Bobonich, “Aristotle, Political Decision Making, and the Many”, cit., 156 f., on the difference between “makers” and “users”, the latter determining the modalities of production in the light of their knowledge of the right use of products.

reasoning. That is to say: a free, intelligent and sufficiently educated citizen is certainly able to understand why the good of the State requires that some of its citizens should be moderately wealthy and its public resources well managed; and what the best way is to protect and increase private property and public resources. This kind of citizen knows the final cause of the conduct prescribed for him, as well as the material and the efficient cause promoting the good of the State. He understands the ultimate end; if needed, probably he would be able to deliberate for its sake. However, since he is a *ruled* citizen, his *ergon* is not to deliberate for the sake of the political end, but rather to espouse true opinion about the ends and means. (He will of course deliberate and prescribe too, though not in the political domain, but only within his own field of competence, e.g. in the military domain if he is an army officer, or in the technical domain if he is an architect.) We know that for Aristotle deliberative reasoning is performed either by those who are moved by an actual desire, a *βούλησις* for a certain end; or by those who, although they are not moved by an actual desire, assume a hypothetical end and reflect on the way to attain it. In the first instance, the conclusion of deliberative reasoning is a choice, a *προαίρεσις*; in the second, the conclusion of deliberative reasoning is a prescription, a rule of conduct of general import but sufficiently detailed. The political practices required to attain the architectonic end, i.e. the good of the State, are the object of rulers' deliberation and do not *technically* derive from the deliberations of the ruled citizens, although they may give their assent. By this, I mean that for Aristotle the ruled citizens do not have an *actual* volition for the good of the State, since the achievement of the architectonic end is not their *ergon*. Obviously, the most cultivated citizens know that the good of the State is mostly desirable but, as long as ruled, their (political) task is limited to agreeing the normative opinions about the good of the State.

Finally, there is one last reason why true opinion is especially significant in the political domain: it is not mere obedience. True opinion is certainly not practical wisdom, but neither is it a similar disposition to the one of the desiring soul when it obeys practical reason. The relationship of authority between practical reason and the desiring soul capable of obedience is irreversible. Within the social and political context, it is expressed, taking into account Aristotle's cultural environment, in the relationships between free but unequal people (e.g. the relationships within a family: as long as he is alive, the head of the family never hands his power over to anyone else). Among equals by birth, the relationship between the rulers and the ruled is reversible. The ruled citizen can therefore become a ruler. In that case, he will have to demonstrate that he possesses practical wisdom, not just true opinion.

Since the State is both a hierarchical structure, as composed of elements differing by species,<sup>46</sup> and a cooperative one, because man is a social being, the ruled citizens, those who are equal by birth and those who are not, have to exercise deliberative reason and possibly a certain amount of prescriptive authority. The deliberative faculty of the ruled aims at attaining ends that they can assume and for which they can develop an actual volition. To take up Aristotle's last analogy: the flute-maker has a smattering of music and he makes the suitable instrument for performing it. However, the flute-maker is not motivated by the performance of music, because the object of his or her volition is the material production of a flute. It is clear too, that the technical knowledge of any subordinate person does not determine the object of his or her volition, as is shown by the fact that both the flute-maker and the flute-player might be slaves. In this case, however, their *ergon* would be to serve, themselves, as instruments for the action (enjoyment of music) of their master. Unsurprisingly, Aristotle maintains that slaves lack deliberative capacity.<sup>47</sup> This does not mean that they are totally unable to reason about what to do; rather, they do not do anything for the sake of an end of *their own* volition. All that slaves can do is to perform a task for the sake of someone else's end (unlike women, whom Aristotle regards as able to assume an end and deliberate for its sake, but not to formulate a prescription).

We have now to try and determine more precisely the notion of "true opinion" with respect to action. In this connection, there are at least three significant texts: chapter 33 of the first book of the *Posterior Analytics*; chapter 3 of the third book of the *De anima*; a passage from the *Categories*. In *Posterior Analytics*, I 33 Aristotle explains the difference between opinion and science, between true and false opinion, between the object of opinion and that of science, and finally between the object of true and false opinion:

It remains that opinion is about what is true or false but can also be otherwise. This is belief (ὑπόληψις) in a proposition which is immediate and not necessary. And this agrees with the appearances; for opinion is unstable, and so too is the nature of the things in question.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, opinion can be a mere proposition or a line of argument indicating the cause of something. It differs from science in that it does not predicate a determination of an object as a determination of the essence of that object.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Polit.* 1262a23–24.

<sup>47</sup> *Polit.* 1260a12–13.

<sup>48</sup> *An. post.* 89a2–5.

In other words, opinion does not consider the definition of the essence of the thing about which we have a certain opinion (89a18–24). We can summarize the characters of opinion as described in this chapter as follows: opinion is an *ὑπόληψις*, the assumption of an immediate premise, whose content we assume as true and not necessary, since the object of opinion may well be different from the way opinion represents it, although it agrees with the phenomena. Moreover, opinion can be derived from the middle terms, which means we can indicate the cause of the content of an opinion we assume as true. However, it cannot be causally founded on the definition of an object of opinion, since in this case the predicate would be necessarily predicated. Furthermore, the object of true opinion is the same as that of false opinion as to the subject of which it is predicated, while it is different as to the predicate. For our present inquiry, it is important to emphasize that true opinion is a representation of something not according to necessity or a definition, but to phenomena—or, as we could also put it, in accord with time-honoured moral principles or with the laws in force. “According to necessity” is a determination we dispense with in the practical domain. True opinion can therefore consist in a normative proposition agreeing with general and accepted principles, which the ruled citizen assumes as an end.

As for the discussion in *De anima* III 3, its most interesting aspect is the link between true opinion and belief (*πίστις*). In *De an.* 428a16–22, Aristotle describes imagination with regard to the other intellectual states, including opinion:

... neither is imagination any of the things that are never in error: e.g. knowledge or intelligence; for imagination may be false. It remains therefore to see if it is opinion, for opinion may be either true or false. But opinion involves belief (for without belief in what we opine we cannot have an opinion), and in the brutes though we often find imagination we never find belief.

What is said about *πίστις* is extremely significant here, insofar as it reveals the assent that those who possess true opinion give to its content.

Finally, in *Cat.* 5. 4a34–4b12 Aristotle illustrates the principle that substance is the only category that receives opposites, and he suggests this may also hold for some forms of knowledge such as reasoning (*logos*) and opinion, which can be either true or false. Aristotle's argument is that an opinion, e.g. that this person is sitting, is true as long as this person is sitting, i.e. an opinion is true as long as what it predicates of its subject corresponds to observable reality, while the subject remains unchanged. The topic of the contrariety of the pred-

icates of a subject, as determining the truth of the opinion, is also significant for the domain of normative opinions, particularly when the latter are considered from the point of view of their dialectical origin. As regards its form and dialectical origin, a normative opinion is a thesis corresponding to one of the contradictory alternatives of a problem (e.g. health is a good, rather than not). The assumption of one of the contradictory alternatives reveals that someone gives their assent to a certain opinion, and that the assent is accompanied by belief. Depending on its soundness, the cultural context where it developed, the process of refutation and verification it has undergone in time, an opinion is assumed as true. The ruled citizens assent to a certain normative opinion in part because they are persuaded by it, but above all because, as citizens, they see it as reflecting their agreement with the rulers. The ruled citizens, at least the ruled citizens that are equal by birth and education to the rulers, accept and carry out a prescription since they view it as the implementation of a normative principle they share.

Let us now use these characteristics of true opinion to help us understand what Aristotle means when he maintains that the ruled do not rely on practical wisdom, but only on true opinion. We can argue that the ruled citizens who are free and equal by birth to their rulers do possess practical wisdom, but fail to use it to deliberate or prescribe, and limit themselves to *pistis*. The ruled citizens believe in the normative principle representing the remote end of those who deliberate and the major premise of the type of practical syllogism into which a certain deliberation can be converted. This means they adhere to the general norm but do not reason on its implementation, i.e. they do not look for a middle term nor do they reason backwards, since these operations are performed by the rulers. Consequently, it is in virtue of their assent to the general norm, in which true opinion is reflected, that they accept the prescriptions they are given.

## 5 Brief Remarks on the Guiding Functions of the State

We can now conclude our inquiry with a brief discussion of what Aristotle views as the fundamental functions of the rulers, i.e. deliberating, judging and prescribing. As already hinted, and as the final part of this analysis should confirm, there is a basic consistency between the structure of deliberative reasoning and the architectonic arrangement of the ends. First, the functions of those who compose the State generally reflect the relationship between deliberative and calculative reason, and desiring soul. Secondly, within what we could term the ruling class of the State, there exists an order or *taxis*, which is both a har-

monious and coherent division of functions and tasks, and an architectonic arrangement within the group of *archontes*. For it may be the case that not all the *archontes* have the same immediate end: some of them may have to prescribe certain tasks to the other *archontes*.

There is another problematic aspect we have to consider. For Aristotle the highest sovereignty should lie with the law, i.e. the written *nomos*, not with the statesman. Aristotle grants the *archontes* a limited sovereignty intended to make up for the prescriptive limits of the laws:

The discussion of the first question shows nothing so clearly as that laws, when good, should be supreme; and that the magistrate or magistrates should regulate those matters only on which the laws are unable to speak with precision owing to the difficulty of any general principle embracing all particulars.<sup>49</sup>

Even now there are magistrates, for example judges, who have authority to decide some matters which the law is unable to determine, since no one doubts that the law would command and decide in the best manner whatever it could. But some things can, and other things cannot, be comprehended under the law, and this is the origin of the vexed question whether the best law or the best man should rule. For matters of detail about which men deliberate cannot be included in legislation.<sup>50</sup>

The question as to whether the highest sovereignty in the government should lie with the law or the wise is dropped in favour of the discussion about the best strategy to “supplement” the law, i.e. fill its gaps. The sovereignty of the written law is preferable to the extent that it is stable and knows no passion. Yet it is far from all-embracing. Aristotle repeatedly claims<sup>51</sup> that the written law fails to take into account all practical circumstances and the minor details of conduct. In these cases, what is called for is the intervention of some authority or institution that will somehow act as a substitute for the law (e.g. the assembly or a wise man who will act as a judge and arbiter for specific cases). But is this really a structural defect of written laws, as Plato would have it? Is it not the peculiar character of the law to indicate a common end for many people through the formulation of a norm, i.e. a proposition stating that a certain class of actions or goods is worth choosing and pursuing? The final sentence

---

<sup>49</sup> *Polit.* 1282b1–6.

<sup>50</sup> 1287b15–23.

<sup>51</sup> See the Aristotelian passages commented on *supra*, pp. 2–4.

of the last text quoted, “matters of detail about which men deliberate cannot be included in legislation (περὶ ὧν γὰρ βουλευόνται νομοθετῆσαι τῶν ἀδυνάτων ἐστὶν)”, suggests that for Aristotle there is a difference between *legislating* (νομοθετεῖν) and *deliberating* (βουλευέσθαι): the latter is a type of reasoning which aims to apply to a specific case an existing law or an established normative principle. Although it has to happen in accord with the laws, political deliberation is different from legislating: it is the act of assessing the circumstances in order to apply the law. In a sense, we can say that political deliberation takes place according to the hypothetico-problematic procedure Aristotle describes as characterizing deliberation in general. After assuming as a hypothesis the attainment of a remote end—i.e. the application of a law—it seeks all the conditions for that end, until it comes to an *eschaton*, i.e. the first act which will be the object of a prescription in the domain of political deliberation. If we consider deliberative reasoning in its syllogistic form, we may say that political deliberation is, broadly speaking, the search for the minor premise, i.e. the one concerning what is possible.

The basic difference between deliberation construed as a kind of reasoning anyone can perform and *political* deliberation depends on the fact that some deliberative processes can be performed in the presence of the actual volition of an end that is *higher* than the one a usual deliberation seems to be aiming at. Political deliberation prescribes some rules of conduct or specific measures in order to apply the law to certain domains of social life. Let us suppose there exists a law on the appropriate use of public money, while some deliberations take place about how to apply it to the education of the young, the organization of the army, and recreational activities. The deliberations that will take place in this connection are in fact originated by the actual volition of an end—i.e. the application of the law—which is higher than the specific ends—education, military organization, recreational activity—for whose attainment the suitable rules of conduct and specific measures are prescribed.

If we are to construe Aristotle's distinction between *legislating* and *deliberating* as the splitting of normative processes at different levels, then we have to assume that, in addition to the laws and above extremely specific and even occasional deliberative interventions, other acts exist aiming to guide action in various domains of life, always in accord with the law. As a result, we have: a) the process of legislation; b) deliberative procedures aiming to prescribe stable but rather flexible rules (regulation); c) deliberative procedures for *ad hoc* prescriptions, which do not always need to be set as a rule of conduct applicable to many cases. The distinction of different deliberative procedures is adumbrated in the following texts:

Speaking generally, those are to be called offices to which the duties are assigned of deliberating about certain measures (βουλευσασθαι περὶ τινῶν) and of judging and prescribing, especially the last; for to prescribe is the especial duty of a magistrate.<sup>52</sup>

This is the nature of the equitable, a correction of law where it is defective owing to its universality. In fact, this is the reason why all things are not determined by law, viz. that about some things it is impossible to lay down a law, so that a decree is needed. For when the thing is indefinite the rule also is indefinite, like the lead rule used in making the Lesbian moulding; the rule adapts itself to the shape of the stone and is not rigid, and so too the decree is adapted to the facts (καὶ τὸ ψήφισμα πρὸς τὰ πράγματα).<sup>53</sup>

On the first passage, we can make the following remarks. By the verbs βουλευσασθαι, κρίναι, ἐπιτάξαι, Aristotle alludes to three distinct functions among which the most authoritative is the third. What is omitted here is the *nomothetein* mentioned in *Polit.* 1287b22, where Aristotle claims that it is not always possible to turn what is deliberated into a law. Legislation, then, is the act whereby a general normative principle is established which must always be observed, though it needs to be supplemented by specific deliberations. The words βουλευσασθαι περὶ τινῶν at 1299a26 will perhaps refer to occasional deliberations about various matters required by the change of things over time (e.g. in times of war and peace). In this case, βουλευσασθαι περὶ τινῶν seems to be similar to βουλευεσθαι in 1287b22, which alludes to a decision about a contingent case that cannot be covered by the *nomos*. Alternatively, the expression βουλευσασθαι περὶ τινῶν refers to deliberating in order to apply a general normative principle to different domains of action and, more importantly, different categories of people (the way of abiding by the *nomoi* can be different e.g. for men and women, or citizens and foreigners). Finally, the verb ἐπιτάξαι indicates the prescription of a kind of conduct agreeing with both the *nomos* and the more specific forms of deliberations.

52 *Polit.* 1299a25–28: μάλιστα δ' ὡς ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν ἀρχὰς λεκτέον ταύτας ὅσαις ἀποδέδοται βουλευσασθαι τε περὶ τινῶν καὶ κρίναι καὶ ἐπιτάξαι, καὶ μάλιστα τοῦτο· τὸ γὰρ ἐπιτάττειν ἀρχικώτερόν ἐστιν.

53 *Eth. nic.* 1137b27–32. Cf. also 1141b27–28. See C.D.C. Reeve, *Aristotle on Practical Wisdom*, cit. 189; decree is opposed to universal law because it is so adapted to particular circumstances as to render any further deliberation unnecessary.



As to the three *archai*—βουλευσασθαι, κρίναι, ἐπιτάξαι—, Aristotle paints a rather complex picture.<sup>54</sup> First, there are magistrates whose task is to deliberate about all such cases as are not expressly covered by the *nomos* (these are not necessarily exceptional cases, but may as well be doubtful or rare ones, which need to be *regulated*, i.e. treated according to the law). Second, there are magistrates whose task is to prescribe what has to be done in compliance with either the *nomos*—in which case prescription has to be construed as a set of rather stable rules, which can be adjusted to the different situations and domains of actions—or the βουλευσασθαι περί τινος, i.e. in accord with a certain deliberation that has become necessary because of a change in the circumstances or in order to apply the law to extremely specific cases. Finally, there are magistrates whose task is κρίναι, i.e. to judge about the breach of a prescription.

To what extent do these acts of the *archai* reflect the ways of reasoning we have previously discussed? Of course, the meaning of the verb βουλευεσθαι in the *Politics* cannot be totally different from its meaning in the ethical treatises. The main difference between deliberation as described in the ethical treatises and political deliberation resides in the fact that, as we have seen, the latter generally takes place in the absence of an actual desire for the end for the sake of which the deliberation is made but in the presence of an actual volition for a higher end; this leads one not to make a choice oneself, but to prescribe a course of conduct for someone else. Apart from this difference, from a formal point of view political deliberation is, like every other deliberation, a type of reasoning that aims to answer the question *how*? As for κρίναι, it must consist in a type of reasoning that aims to answer the questions *what?* and *why?* For the judge has to ascertain a fact and reconstruct culprits' actions and motives. Unlike the deliberating subject, the judge sees the aim of the action not as the starting point, but as the endpoint, i.e. as an unknown element to be revealed. We may therefore suppose that Aristotle considered the syllogistic form—into which an individual deliberation can be converted—as useful also for the discovery of the final cause of an action, because syllogism is the only form of reasoning allowing us to link an act, which is known, with its cause, i.e. the purpose or end of the agent.

54 On distribution of offices, see D. Frede, "Citizenship in Aristotle's *Politics*", in R. Kraut-S. Skultety (eds.), *Aristotle's Politics. Critical Essays*, Rowman-Littlefield Publ., Lanham 2005, 107–183, esp. 171–175.

# Conclusions

What general conclusions can we draw from Aristotle's use of prescription and how can we assess its position within his practical philosophy? Prescribing an action is analogous to choosing to act in a certain way, yet prescription has the form of an order or, more frequently, a rule. Prescribing is analogous to choosing because there is no other kind of *practical* reasoning, i.e. reasoning useful for achieving a goal, that is not deliberative reasoning in a hypothetical and problematic form. In Aristotle's works the adjective *πρακτικός*, if referred to reason (*διάνοια*, *λόγος*) or acts of thinking (*νοῦς*, *νόησις*), is a synonym for "deliberative".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, when characterizing a form of knowledge, *πρακτικός* indicates that that knowledge is about human action (sometimes including production), as opposed to theoretical knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Deliberative reasoning is the starting point not only for individual choices but also for such prescriptive acts as laws, decrees, and precepts, i.e. all resolutions guiding the conduct of other people than those who have done the deliberation.

Prescription is, however, a practical act that plays a much more significant role in Aristotle's philosophy than this might suggest. For it concerns not only the social, i.e. domestic and political, sphere. Prescription within social life is just a product of the prescriptive aspect of practical reason. Aristotle introduces his idea of prescription in the passages where he refers to the soul's commanding function over the body and, more precisely, to the commanding function of practical reason over the desiring soul.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the role played by practical reason with the respect to the desiring soul echoes the characteristics of prescription as distinguished from choice: prescription is always an order given by a deliberating subject (i.e. reason) to *another* subject that has the ability to obey the order (i.e. the desiring soul). That the kind of prescription Aristotle talks about in these passages occurs within an individual soul does not prevent it from being the model of any form of prescription, from any point of view. Prescription is different from choice in that it can result from a deliberation occurring in the absence of an actual desire. This is basically what happens within the soul of a rational individual, where a component which does not desire, but thinks, prescribes a certain conduct and an object of choice

1 Cf. *De an.* 407a23; 433a14 (νοῦς δὲ ὁ ἕνεκά του λογιζόμενος καὶ ὁ πρακτικός); 433a16–18 (where Aristotle claims that the ὁρεκτόν and, through it, διάνοια πρακτική are the cause of action); *Eth. eud.* 1217a6–7 (διάνοιαν ἀρχιτεκτονικήν ἢ πρακτικήν); *Eth. nic.* 1141b47.

2 See e.g. *Eth. nic.* 1139a27; *Metaph.* 1025b25.

3 *Top.* 128b19; *Eth. eud.* 1220b5–9.

to the desiring component. Choice cannot be traced back entirely to the rational faculty and the exercise of deliberative reason, since Aristotle describes it as ὄρεξις βουλευτική.<sup>4</sup> It combines the desire for the end with a deliberation about the means for achieving it; action only results from this combination. Therefore, if choice is the decision to act made by someone who has deliberated, then from the point of view of the psychology of action the choice of acting in a certain way is a prescription, so to speak, that someone gives to him- or herself.

If we consider a more complex prescriptive context, the presence of desire acquires a crucial significance. Desire is the chief and prevailing motive for action. Human beings act for the same reason that animals move, but they can and must act following a kind of desire which is the prerogative of rational beings, i.e. βούλησις. Although desire is an essential condition of action, practical reason must be able to deliberate and prescribe an action even in the absence of an actual desire that is in keeping with the end for the sake of which the deliberation and the prescription occur. Such a conclusion can indirectly be drawn, as we have seen,<sup>5</sup> from Aristotle's treatment of ἀκρασία. The incontinent is someone who has a normative opinion about the good and is able to deliberate with a view to the good. As Aristotle's examples make clear, the incontinent's deliberative reason is able to prescribe good conduct (or, at least, to restrain him from the wrong one). However, in the incontinent's soul there is no actual βούλησις for the good, but rather an actual ἐπιθυμία for the bad. The discussion of ἀκρασία has a significant theoretical consequence which goes beyond ἀκρασία itself: the possibility of outlining a set of actions that will be performed by someone else, in order to achieve someone else's end (or satisfy someone else's need). The prescriptive *logos* of the rational soul, then, is the model for prescription and warns us against viewing prescription as a minor aspect of Aristotle's practical philosophy. For it is precisely in the prescriptive role played by practical and deliberative reason that interpersonal relationships and the political and social order have their foundation.

Next, I have argued that even if deliberating subjects may not feel an actual desire for the end for the sake of which they deliberate and give prescriptions to other people, nonetheless they may desire a higher end than that for the sake of which they deliberate and give prescriptions. This is a consequence of construing prescription as an action or, in some cases, a task that someone must set themselves. Such is the case of lawgivers and magistrates who formulate

4 *Eud. eth.* 1226b17.

5 See ch. 3, esp. pp. 132–133.

laws and decrees. In order to clarify the relationship between possession, use and *ergon*, Aristotle takes numerous examples from the arts, the sciences and even the most mundane activities, all of which show that those who have, so to speak, an intermediate position within the social order perform tasks that are at least partially prescriptive. These people combine a prescriptive role with an auxiliary role. This point is crucial to Aristotle's view of prescription. For prescription does not coincide with the sovereignty of the laws or of the highest authorities within the political order, nor with the moral authority of the normative principle. Prescription is rather a functional authority, and it originates from one's ability to deduce through a knowledge of material and efficient causes a good practical resolution, a valid solution to a problem, the best way to achieve a goal worth pursuing and holding up as a model for *other people's* action. However, if we regard prescription as an action (i.e. as the act of prescribing), we have to conclude that it is an action motivated by a desire, a βούλησις, whose object is higher, i.e. a superordinate end. As compared to this higher end, which is desired by those who prescribe, the goals for the sake of which a prescription has been formulated must be viewed as intermediate ends. In other words, they are the stages by which we approach a higher end, just as the various stages of deliberative reasoning represent the steps leading us to achieve the remote end.

The analogy between the way prescription is exercised within the social and political order and the scheme of deliberation is extremely significant, since it allows us to see that those who play a prescriptive role mostly have to play an auxiliary part as well, i.e. they have to serve as tools for achieving higher goals. The fact that the same deliberating subject must perform both a prescriptive and an auxiliary function is linked to their having a more or less extensive knowledge of the causes. Deliberative reasoning requires that all such conditions be identified as allow it to "move backwards" from the remote end to the state in which the deliberating subject happens to be. As we have pointed out,<sup>6</sup> in order to reconstruct this chain, we have to identify either the material or the efficient cause of each of the intermediate stages separating us from the remote end. These intermediate stages are material conditions and efficient causes in the course of the deliberating process, whereas in the course of action they are final, if intermediate, causes. This logical structure holds as well for those who deliberate in order to give prescriptions, not to perform an action themselves—the difference being that the deliberating subject will always have to move backwards from the remote end to the state in which the acting subject hap-

---

6 See ch. 3, esp. pp. 121–128.

pens to be. From the point of view of an organized community, the task of those who prescribe often seems to be to indicate to other people such actions as are useful for achieving an end which will become, for those who gave the prescription, the means for achieving a further end. Therefore, those who prescribe exercise an authority but also perform an auxiliary function, if the end for the sake of which they have prescribed is the tool for achieving a further end. A horseman is prescriptive when he orders a craftsman to make riding equipment, and he is auxiliary when he fights on his horse using that equipment.

I hope the arguments I have offered suffice to show that prescription, although admittedly it does not receive such an extensive and independent treatment as virtue, happiness, friendship, etc., plays a crucial part indeed in Aristotle's practical philosophy. If we accept this general conclusion, we may identify other issues which, though I could not deal with them in this book, might well be included in a fuller discussion of prescription. One of these issues is surely the relationship between ἀκρασία and prescription. As we have seen, this relationship is clearly evoked in *De an.* 433a1–8, where Aristotle discusses some cases of potential conflict between the soul's different components, and the prescriptive role of deliberative reason clashes with an actual ἐπιθυμία. Another, more complex point is the presence of desire in the soul of those who receive a prescription. Since they did not do the deliberating themselves, they did not posit the end as the initial hypothesis; yet they will have to act in accord with that deliberative reasoning. Will they then have to develop a desire which will be the main cause of their action? Or will those who receive a prescription deliberated by someone else only act through coercion? The importance of this point becomes clear when we consider the educational aspect of prescription. Being exercised by law, tradition and precepts, or by the teachers of wisdom, prescription must not just deliberate what has to be done; at least to a certain extent it has to promote the βούλησις for the good in the soul of those who are given rules of conduct.



# Bibliography

- Acerbi F., "Pappus, Aristote et le τόπος ἀναλυόμενος", *Revue des Etudes Grecques*, 124 (2011), 93–113.
- Achtenberg D., "The Role of the *Ergon* Argument in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*", *Ancient Philosophy*, 9 (1989), 37–48, repr. in J.P. Anton-A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, IV: *Aristotle's Ethics*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1991, 59–72.
- Achtenberg D., *Cognition of Value in Aristotle's Ethics. Promise of Enrichment, Threat of Destruction*, State University of New York Press, New York 2002.
- Ackrill J.L., "Aristotle on Action", *Mind*, 87 (1978), 595–601; repr. in A. Rorty Oksenberg (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1980, 93–101.
- Ackrill J.L., "Aristotle on *Eudamonia*", *Proceedings of British Academy*, 60 (1974), 339–359, repr. in A. Rorty Oksenberg (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1980, 15–33.
- Allan D.J., "The Practical Syllogism", in *Autour d'Aristote. Recueil d'études de philosophie ancienne et médiévale offert à Monseigneur A. Mansion*, Publications Universitaires de Louvain, Louvain 1955, 325–340.
- Allen D., "Changing the Authoritative Voice: Lycurgus' *Against Leocrates*", *Classical Antiquity*, 19 (2000), 5–33.
- Ando T., *Aristotle's Theory of Practical Cognition. With a Preface by W.D. Ross*, Nijhoff, The Hague 1965<sup>2</sup>.
- Annas J., *The Morality of Happiness*, OUP, New York-Oxford 1993.
- Annas J., "Virtue and Law in Plato", in C. Bobonich (ed.), *Plato's Laws. A Critical Guide*, CUP, Cambridge 2010, 71–91.
- Anscombe G.E.M., *Intention*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA)-London 1963<sup>2</sup>.
- Aubenque P., *La prudence chez Aristote*, PUF, Paris 1963.
- Baker S.H., "The Concept of *Ergon*: Towards an Achievement Interpretation of Aristotle's Function Argument", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 48 (2015), 227–266.
- Barnes J. (ed.), *Aristotle. Posterior Analytics*, Oxford 1993<sup>2</sup>.
- Barnes J., *Causes et preuves*, in C. Viano-C. Natali-M. Zingano (eds), *Aitia 1. Les quatre causes d'Aristote: origines et interprétations*, Peeters, Leuven 2013, 75–90.
- Barney R., "Aristotle's Argument for a Human Function", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (2008), 293–322.
- Bartlett R.C.-Collins S.D. (eds.), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. A New Translation*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2011.
- Bates C.A., Jr., "Law and the Rule of Law and Its Place Relative to *Politeia* in Aristotle's

- Politics*”, in L. Huppes Cluysenaer-N.M.M.S. Coelho (eds.), *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Law: Theory, Practice, and Justice*, Springer, Dordrecht 2013, 59–75.
- Berti E., “Ragione pratica e normatività in Aristotele”, in Id., *Nuovi studi aristotelici* 111: *Filosofia pratica*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2008, 25–36.
- Berti E., “Φρόνησις et science politique”, in P. Aubenque-A. Tordesillas (eds.), *Aristote politique. Etudes sur la Politique d’Aristote*, PUF, Paris 1993, 436–459, repr. in E. Berti, *Nuovi studi aristotelici*. 111 *Filosofia pratica*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2008, 39–59.
- Bien G., *Die Grundlegung der politischen Philosophie bei Aristoteles*, Alber Verlag, München 1980<sup>2</sup>.
- Bloch D., *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection. Text, Translation, Interpretation, and Reception in Western Scholasticism*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2007.
- Bobonich C., “Aristotle, Political Decision Making, and the Many”, in T. Lockwood-T. Samaras (eds.), *Aristotle’s Politics. A Critical Guide*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, 142–162.
- Bobzien S., “Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 1113b7–8 and Free Choices”, in P. Destrée-R. Salles-M. Zingano (eds.), *What is Up to Us? Studies on Agency and Responsibility in Ancient Philosophy*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2014, 59–74.
- Bobzien S., “Choice and Moral Responsibility (NE iii 1–5)”, in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2014, 81–109.
- Boeri M.D., “Sobre los trasfondos socráticos en la teoría aristotélica de la acción”, *Revista Philosophica*, 33 (2008), 7–26.
- Bostock D., *Aristotle’s Ethics*, OUP, Oxford 2000, repr. 2006.
- Broadie S., *Ethics with Aristotle*, OUP, Oxford-New York 1991.
- Broadie S., “Philosophical Introduction”, in S. Broadie-C. Rowe (eds.), *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics*, OUP, Oxford 2002, 9–80.
- Broadie S., “Where Is the Activity?”, in J.G. Lennox-R. Bolton (eds.), *Being, Nature, and Life in Aristotle. Essays in Honour of Allan Gotthelf*, CUP, Cambridge 2010, 198–211.
- Brown L., “Why Is Aristotle’s Virtue of Character a Mean? Taking Aristotle at His Word (NE ii 6)”, in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2014, 64–80.
- Burnet J., *The Ethics of Aristotle*, Methuen, London 1900.
- Burnyeat M.F., “Aristotle on Learning to Be Good”, in A. Rorty Oksenberg (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1980, 69–92.
- Calvo Martínez T., “La religiosité de Socrate chez Xénophon”, in M. Narcy-A. Tordesillas (eds.), *Xénophon et Socrate. Actes du Colloque d’Aix-en-Provence (6–9 novembre 2005)*, Vrin, Paris 2008, 49–64.
- Cambiano G., *Come nave in tempesta. Il governo della città in Platone e Aristotele*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2016.
- Cammack D., “Aristotle’s Denial of Deliberation about Ends”, *Polis. The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought*, 30 (2013), 228–250.



- Caston V., "Why Aristotle Needs Imagination", *Phronesis*, 41 (1996), 20–55.
- Cattanei E., "L'immaginario geometrico dell'uomo che delibera. Schemi di esercizio della *phantasia bouleutike* in Aristotele", in A. Fermani-M. Migliori (eds.), *Attività e virtù. Anima e corpo in Aristotele*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2009, 83–112.
- Charles D., *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1984.
- Charles D., "Aristotle on the Highest Good. A New Approach", in J. Aufderheide-R.M. Bader (eds.), *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, OUP, Oxford 2015, 60–82.
- Charles D., *Definition and Explanation in the Posterior Analytics and Metaphysics*, in D. Charles (ed.), *Definition in Greek Philosophy*, OUP, Oxford 2010, repr. 2013, 286–328.
- Charles D., "Nicomachean Ethics VII. 3: Varieties of *Akrasia*", in C. Natali (ed.), *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII. Symposium Aristotelicum*, OUP, Oxford 2009, 41–71.
- Chernyakhovskaya O., *Sokrates bei Xenophon. Moral-Politik-Religion*, Narr, Tübingen 2014.
- Cherry K.M., *Plato, Aristotle and the Purpose of Politics*, CUP, Cambridge 2012.
- Clarke B., "Commentary on Price", *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 21, Brill, Leiden 2006, 213–231.
- Classen C.J., *Herrscher, Bürger und Erzieher. Beobachtungen zu den Reden des Isokrates*, Olms, Hildesheim 2010.
- Collins J.H., *Exhortations to Philosophy. The Protreptics of Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle*, OUP, Oxford-New York 2015.
- Coope U., "Why does Aristotle Think that Ethical Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?", *Phronesis*, 57 (2012), 142–163.
- Cooper J.M., *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1975, repr. Hackett Publ., Indianapolis-Cambridge (MA) 1986.
- Corcilius K., "Aristoteles' praktische Syllogismen in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts", in C. Rapp-P. Brüllmann (eds.), "The Practical Syllogism", *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy/Philosophiegeschichte und logische Analyse*, 11 (2008), 101–132.
- Corcilius K., "Praktische Syllogismen bei Aristoteles", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 90 (2008), 247–297.
- Corcilius K., "Two Jobs for Aristotle's Practical Syllogism?", in C. Rapp-Brüllmann (eds.), "The Practical Syllogism", *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy/Philosophiegeschichte und logische Analyse*, 11 (2008), 163–184.
- Crubellier M., "Le 'syllogisme pratique' ou comment la pensée meut le corps", in A. Laks-M. Rashed (eds.), *Aristote et le mouvement des animaux. Dix études sur le De motu animalium*, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, Villeneuve d'Ascq 2004, 9–26.
- Cuomo S., "Collecting Authorities, Constructing Authority in Pappus of Alexandria's Συναγωγή", in W. Kullmann-J. Althoff-M. Asper (eds.), *Gattungen wissenschaftlicher Literatur in der Antike*, Narr, Tübingen 1998, 219–237.

- Cuomo S., *Pappus of Alexandria and the Mathematics of Late Antiquity*, CUP, Cambridge-New York 2000.
- Curzer H., "Aristotle's Practical Syllogisms", *The Philosophical Forum*, 46 (2015), 129–153.
- Curzer H., "How Good People do Bad Things. Aristotle on the Misdeeds of the Virtuous", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 28 (2005), 233–256.
- Dahl N.O., *Practical Reason, Aristotle, and Weakness of the Will*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984.
- Depew D., "The Inscription of Isocrates into Aristotle's Practical Philosophy", in T. Poulakos-D.J. Depew (eds.), *Isocrates and Civic Education*, Univ. of Texas Press, Austin 2004, 157–185.
- Destrée P., "Aristotle on the Causes of *Akasia*", in C. Bobonich-P. Destrée (eds.), *Akasia in Greek Philosophy. From Socrates to Plotinus*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2007, 139–165.
- Devereux D.T., "Particular and Universal in Aristotle's Conception of Practical Knowledge", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 39 (1986), 483–504.
- Devereux D.T., "Scientific and Ethical Methods in Aristotle's *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*", in D. Henry-K.M. Nielsen, *Bridging the Gap between Aristotle's Science and Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, 130–147.
- Dihle A., *A History of Greek Literature from Homer to the Hellenistic Period*, Routledge, London-New York 1994 (transl. from German edition, Beck's, Munich 1991).
- Dirlmeier F., *Aristoteles. Eudemische Ethik. Übersetzt und kommentiert*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1962.
- Donini P.L., *Abitudine e saggezza. Aristotele dall'Etica Eudemia all' Etica Nicomachea*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2014.
- Donini P.L., *Aristotele. Etica Eudemia. Traduzione, introduzione e note*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2005<sup>2</sup>.
- Düring I., *Aristotle's Protrepticus. An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborg 1961.
- El Murr D., *Savoir et gouverner. Essai sur la science politique platonicienne*, Vrin, Paris 2014.
- Engberg-Pedersen T., *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1983, repr. 2002.
- Everson S., "Aristotle on Nature and Value", in S. Everson (ed.), *Companions to Ancient Thought*, 4: *Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 1998, 77–106.
- Ferrari G.R.F., "Socratic Irony as Pretence", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (2008), 1–33.
- Ferrarin A., "Aristotle on  $\phi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\alpha$ ", in J.J. Cleary-G.M. Gurtler (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 21, Brill, Leiden 2006, 89–123.
- Fortenbaugh W.W., "Parainesis. Isocrates and Theophrastus", *Hyperboreus*, 15 (2009), 251–262.

- Fossheim H.J., "The prooimia, Types of Motivation, and Moral Psychology", in C. Horn (ed.), *Platon. Gesetzte—Nomoi*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2013, 87–104.
- Frank J., "On *Logos* and Politics in Aristotle", in T. Lockwood-T. Samaras (eds.), *Aristotle's Politics. A Critical Guide*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, 9–26.
- Frede D., "Citizenship in Aristotle's *Politics*", in R. Kraut-S. Skultety (eds.), *Aristotle's Politics. Critical Essays*, Rowman-Littlefield Publ., Lanham 2005, 107–183.
- Frede D., "The Cognitive Role of *Phantasia* in Aristotle", in M.C. Nussbaum-A. Oksenberg Rorty (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle's De anima*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1992, 279–295.
- Frede D., "Determining the Good in Action. Wish, Deliberation, and Choice", in J. Aufderheide-R.M. Bader (eds.), *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, OUP, Oxford 2015, 15–35.
- Garver E., *Aristotle's Politics. Living Well and Living Together*, University Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2011.
- Gastaldi S., "Il re 'signore di tutto': il problema della *pambasileia* nella *Politica* di Aristotele", in S. Gastaldi-J.-F. Pradeau (eds.), *Le philosophe, le roi, le tyran. Études sur les figures royale et tyrannique dans la pensée grecque et sa postérité*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2009, 33–52.
- Gauthier R.A.-Jolif J.Y. (eds.), *L'Éthique à Nicomaque. Introduction, traduction et commentaire*, Nauwelaerts, Paris 1970<sup>2</sup>.
- Gigon O., *Aristotelis Opera*. Vol. III: *librorum deperditorum fragmenta*, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1987<sup>2</sup>.
- Gill M.L., *Virtue and Reason in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, in D. Henry-K.M. Nielsen (eds.), *Bridging the Gap between Aristotle's Science and Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, 94–110.
- Gómez-Lobo A., "The *Ergon* Inference", *Phronesis*, 34 (1989), 170–184, repr. in J.P. Anton-A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, IV: *Aristotle's Ethics*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1991, 43–58.
- Gottlieb P., "The Ethical Syllogism", in C. Rapp-O. Brüllmann, "The Practical Syllogism", *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy/Philosophiegeschichte und logische Analyse*, 11 (2008), 197–212.
- Gottlieb P., *The Virtue of Aristotle's Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2009.
- Grant A., *The Ethics of Aristotle illustrated with Essays and Notes*, London 1857.
- Gray V.J., "Xenophon's Socrates and Democracy", *Polis. The Journal of Ancient Greek Political Thought*, 28 (2011), 1–32.
- Greenwood L.H.G., *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics Book Six, with Essays, Notes, and Translation*, CUP, Cambridge 1909.
- Grönroos G., "Wish, Motivation and the Human Good in Aristotle", *Phronesis*, 60 (2015), 60–87.
- Gunderson E., "The Rhetoric of Rhetorical Theory", in E. Gunderson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, CUP, Cambridge 2009, 109–125.

- Hankinson R.J., "Perception and Evaluation. Aristotle on the Moral Imagination", *Dialogue. Canadian Philosophical Review*, 29 (1990), 41–63.
- Hardie W.F.R., *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1980<sup>2</sup>.
- Haskins E.V.C., "Choosing between Isocrates and Aristotle. Disciplinary Assumptions and Pedagogical Implications", *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 36 (2006), 191–201.
- Hintikka J.-Remes U., *The Method of Analysis. Its Geometrical Origin and Its General Significance*, Reidel Publ., Dordrecht-Boston 1974.
- Hitz Z., "Aristotle on Law and Moral Education", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 42 (2012), 264–306.
- Horn C., "Individual Competence and Collective Deliberation in Aristotle's *Politics*", in C. Arruzza-D. Nikulin (eds.), *Philosophy and Political Power in Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden 2016, 94–113.
- Horn C., "Law, Governance, and Political Obligation", in M. Deslauriers-P. Destrée (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, CUP, Cambridge 2013, 223–246.
- Horn C., "Socrates on Political Thought. The Testimonies of Plato and Xenophon", *Elenchos*, 29 (2008), 279–302.
- Hourcade A., *Le conseil dans la pensée antique. Les sophistes, Platon, Aristote*, Hermann, Paris 2017.
- Hübner J., "Produktion und Praxis in der *Nikomachischen Ethik*", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 62 (2008), 31–52.
- Hutchinson D.S.-Johnson M.R., *Aristotle: Protrepticus or Exhortation to Philosophy. Citations, Fragments, Paraphrases, and Other Evidence*, [www.protrepticus.info](http://www.protrepticus.info), updated September 2017.
- Hutchinson D.S.-Johnson M.R., "Authenticating Aristotle's *Protrepticus*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 29 (2005), 193–294.
- Hutchinson D.S.-Johnson M.R., "Protreptic Aspects of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*", in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2014, 383–409.
- Irwin T., *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics*, Hackett Publ., Indianapolis 1985.
- Joachim H.H., *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics. A Commentary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1951.
- Johnson M.R., "Aristotle's Architectonic Sciences", in D. Ebrey (ed.), *Theory and Practice in Aristotle's Natural Science*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, 163–186.
- Jones A.R., *Book 7 of Pappus' Collection. Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, Springer, New York/Berlin 1986.
- Johnstone C.L., "Sophistical Wisdom. *Politikê Aretê* and *Logosophia*", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 39 (2006), 265–289.
- Karbowsky J., "Endoxa, Facts, and the Starting Points of the *Nicomachean Ethics*", in D. Henry-K.M. Nielsen, *Bridging the Gap between Aristotle's Science and Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2015, 113–129.

- Kenny A., *Aristotle's Theory of the Will*, Duckworth, London 1979.
- Kraut R., *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1989.
- Kraut R., *Aristotle. Political Philosophy*, OUP, Oxford 2002.
- Kraut R., "Doing without Morality: Reflections on the Meaning of *Dein* in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 30 (2006), 159–200.
- Kraut R., "How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method", in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Blackwell, Oxford 2006, 76–95.
- Kristjánsson K., *Aristotelian Character Education*, Routledge, London 2015.
- Laks A., "The Laws", in C. Rowe-M. Schofield (eds., in association with S. Harrison-M. Lane), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, CUP, Cambridge 2000, 258–291.
- Lane M., "Claims to Rule: the Case of the Multitude", in M. Deslauriers-P. Destrée (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, CUP, Cambridge 2013, 247–274.
- Lasserre F. (ed.), *De Léodamas de Thasos à Philippe d'Oponthe. Témoignages et fragments. Edition, traduction et commentaire*, Bibliopolis, Naples 1987.
- Leigh F. (ed.), *The Eudemian Ethics on the Voluntary, Friendship, and Luck. The Sixth S.V. Keeling Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2012.
- Leunissen M., *Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Science of Nature*, CUP, Cambridge 2010, repr. 2011.
- Lisi F., "The Concept of Law in Aristotle's Politics", in J.J. Cleary-G.M. Gurtler (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 16, Brill, Leiden 2000, 29–53.
- Lorenz H., "Virtue of Character in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 37 (2009), 177–212.
- Louden R.B., "Aristotle's Practical Particularism", *Ancient Philosophy*, 6 (1986), 123–138.
- Mansfeld J., *Prolegomena Mathematica. From Apollonius of Perga to the Late Neoplatonists. With an Appendix on Pappus and the History of Platonism*, Brill, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1998.
- McDowell J., "The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*", in A. Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1980, 359–376.
- McDowell J., "Virtue and Reason", *The Monist*, Vol. 62, No. 3: *The Concept of a Person in Ethical Theory* (July, 1979), 331–350.
- Mele A.R., "The Practical Syllogism and Deliberation in Aristotle's Causal Theory of Action", *The New Scholasticism*, 55 (1981), 281–316.
- Menn S., "Plato and the Method of Analysis", *Phronesis*, 47 (2002), 193–233.
- Merker A., *Le principe de l'action humaine selon Démosthène et Aristote. Haïresis—Prohaïresis*, LBL, Paris 2016.
- Mignucci M., *Aristotele. Analitici Primi. Traduzione, introduzione e commento*, Loffredo, Naples 1969.

- Mignucci M., *La teoria aristotelica della scienza*, Sansoni, Florence 1965.
- Miller F.D., "Aristotle on Rationality in Action", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 37 (1984), 499–520.
- Montanari F., *L'epica e la poesia didascalica*, in F. Montanari (ed.), *Da Omero agli Alessandrini. Problemi e figure della letteratura greca*, Nuova Italia Scientifica, Rome 1988, 13–82.
- Moss J., "Akrasia and Perceptual Illusion", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 91 (2009), 119–156.
- Moss J., *Aristotle on the Apparent Good. Perception, Phantasia, Thought and Desire*, OUP, Oxford, 2012.
- Moss J., "Right Reason in Plato and Aristotle: On the Meaning of *Logos*", *Phronesis*, 59 (2014), 181–230.
- Müller Jörn, "Ergon und Eudaimonia. Plädoyer für eine unifizierende Interpretation der Ergon-Argumente in den aristotelischen *Ethiken*", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 57 (2003), 513–542.
- Müller Jozef, "Practical and Productive Thinking in Aristotle", *Phronesis*, 63 (2018), 148–175.
- Natali C., "Aitia in Plato and Aristotle. From Everyday Language to Technical Vocabulary", in C. Viano-C. Natali-M. Zingano (eds.), *Aitia 1. Les quatre causes d'Aristote: origines et interprétations*, Peeters, Leuven 2013, 39–73.
- Natali C., "The Book on Wisdom", in R. Polansky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, CUP, Cambridge 2014, 180–202.
- Natali C., *Il metodo e il trattato. Saggio sull'Etica Nicomachea*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 2017.
- Natali C., *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, transl. by G. Parks, State University of New York Press, Albany 2001 (It. ed. *La saggezza di Aristotele*, Bibliopolis, Naples 1989).
- Nielsen K.M., "Deliberation as Inquiry: Aristotle's Alternative to the Presumption of Open Alternatives", *Philosophical Review*, 120 (2011), 383–421.
- Nussbaum M.C., *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium. Text with Translation, Commentary, and Interpretative Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1978.
- Pakaluk M., *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. An Introduction*, CUP, Cambridge 2005.
- Pearson G., *Aristotle on Desire*, CUP, Cambridge 2012.
- Pellegrin P., *L'excellence menacée. Sur la philosophie politique d'Aristote*, Classiques Garnier, Paris 2017.
- Peterson S., "Horos (Limit) in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*", *Phronesis*, 33 (1988), 233–250.
- Petrucchi F.M., "Sulle tracce della virtù nell'*Ippia minore*. Tra semantica prestazionale e prospettiva epistemica", *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft*, N.F. 36 (2012), 138–156.
- Polansky R., *Aristotle's De anima*, CUP, Cambridge 2007, repr. 2008.

- Politis V., *The Structure of Enquiry in Plato's Early Dialogues*, CUP, Cambridge 2015.
- Poulakos J., "Rhetoric and Civic Education. From the Sophists to Isocrates", in T. Poulakos-D. Depew (eds.), *Isocrates and Civic Education*, University of Texas Press, Austin 2004, 69–83.
- Price A.W., *Virtue and Reason in Plato and Aristotle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2011.
- Price A.W., "Was Aristotle a Particularist?", in J.J. Cleary-G.M. Gurtler (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 21, Brill, Leiden 2006, 191–212.
- Raaflaub K.A., *Poets, Lawgivers, and the Beginnings of Political Reflection in Archaic Greece*, in C.J. Rowe-M. Schofield (eds., in association with S. Harrison-M. Lane), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, CUP, Cambridge 2000, 23–58.
- Reeve C.D.C., *Aristotle on Practical Wisdom. Nicomachean Ethics VI, Translated, with an Introduction, Analysis and Commentary*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA)-London 2013.
- Reeve C.D.C., *Aristotle. Politics. Translated with Introduction and Notes*, Hackett Publ., Indianapolis-Cambridge (MA) 1998.
- Reeve C.D.C., *Practices of Reason. Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1992, repr. 2002.
- Renahan R.F., "The Platonism of Lycurgus", *Greek Roman Byzantine Studies*, 11 (1970), 219–231.
- Rese F., *Praxis und Logos bei Aristoteles. Handlung, Vernunft und Rede in Nikomachischer Ethik, Rhetorik und Politik*, Mohr Siebeck 2003.
- Riesbeck D.J., *Aristotle on Political Community*, CUP, Cambridge 2016.
- Rodrigo P., "Aristote et le savoir politique. La question de l'architectonie (*Éthique à Nicomaque*, I, 1)", in G. Romeyer Dherbey-G. Aubry (eds.), *L'excellence de la vie. Sur "L'Éthique à Nicomaque" et "L'Éthique à Eudème" d'Aristote*, Vrin, Paris 2002, 15–37.
- Rosler A., *Political Authority and Obligation in Aristotle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2005, repr. 2007.
- Ross W.D., *Aristotle. With a New Introduction by John L. Ackrill*, Routledge, London 1923, 1995<sup>6</sup>.
- Rowe C.J., *Plato. Statesman. Translated with Introduction*, Hackett Publ., Indianapolis-Cambridge (MA) 1999.
- Rowe C.J., *Plato. Symposium. Edited with an introduction, translation and commentary*, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, 1998.
- Rowe C.J., "The *Politicus* and Other Dialogues", in C. Rowe-M. Schofield (eds., in association with S. Harrison-M. Lane), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, CUP, Cambridge 2000, 233–256.
- Rowe C.J., "What Might We Learn From the *Clitophon* About the Nature of the Academy?", in K. Döring-M. Erler-S. Schorn (eds.), *Pseudoplatonica. Akten des Kongresses*

- zu den Pseudoplatonica vom 6.–9. Juli 2003 in Bamberg, Steiner, Stuttgart 2005, 213–224.
- Salmieri G., "Aristotle's Non-'Dialectical' Methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics*", *Ancient Philosophy*, 29 (2009), 311–335.
- Santas G., *Goodness and Justice. Plato, Aristotle, and the Moderns*, Blackwell, Oxford 2001.
- Segvic H., "Deliberation and Choice in Aristotle", in M. Pakaluk-G. Pearson (eds.), *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle*, OUP, Oxford, 2011, 159–184.
- Simpson P.L.P., "On the Text of Some Disputed Passages in Aristotle's *Ethica Eudemia*", *Classical Quarterly*, 62, 2012, 541–552.
- Simpson P.L.P., *The Eudemian Ethics of Aristotle. Translated with Explanatory Comments*, Transactions Publishers, New Brunswick-London 2013.
- Slings S.R. (ed.), *Plato. Clitophon. Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries, n. 37), CUP, Cambridge 1999.
- Stewart A.W., *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs. Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self*, CUP, Cambridge 2016.
- Szabó A., "Analysis und Synthesis. Pappus II p. 634 ff. Hultsch", *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis*, 10–11 (1974–1975), 155–164.
- Taylor C.C.W., *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics. Books II–IV. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, repr. 2009
- Taylor C.C.W., *Pleasure, Mind, and Soul. Selected Papers in Ancient Philosophy*, OUP, Oxford 2008.
- Terrel J., *La Politique d'Aristote. La démocratie à l'épreuve de la division sociale*, Vrin, Paris 2015.
- Urmson J.O., "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 10 (1973), 223–230, repr. in A. Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1980, 157–170.
- Vegetti M., "Normal, naturel, normatif dans l'éthique d'Aristote", in G. Romeyer Dherbey-G. Aubry (eds.), *L'excellence de la vie. Sur "l'Éthique à Nicomaque" et "l'Éthique à Eudème" d'Aristote*, Vrin, Paris 2002, 63–74.
- Vigo A.G., "Naturalismo trascendental. Una interpretación de la fundamentación aristotélica de la ética", in C. Natali (ed.), *Aristotle. Metaphysics and Practical Philosophy. Essays in Honour of Enrico Berti*, Peeters, Leuven 2011, 111–142.
- Wareh T., *The Theory and Practice of Life. Isocrates and the Philosophers*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2012.
- White N., "Ethical Particularism in Aristotle", in W. Högrefe (ed.), *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2004, 54–61.
- Wiggins D., "Deliberation and Practical Reason", in A. Rorty Oksenberg (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1980, 221–240.



- Woods M., *Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics, Book I, II, and VIII, with Translation and Commentary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1982.
- Wright G.H., von, *Explanation and Understanding*, Cornell University Press, New York-London 1971.
- Wright G.H., von, "Practical Inference", *The Philosophical Review*, 72 (1963), 159–179.
- Yuridin J., "Aristotelian Imagination and the Explanation of Behavior", in G. Van Riel-P. Destrée (eds., with the assistance of C.K. Crawford-L. Van Campe), *Ancient Perspectives on Aristotle's De Anima*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2009, 71–87.
- Zhmud L., "Eudemus' History of Mathematics", in I. Bodnár-W.W. Fortenbaugh (eds.), *Eudemus of Rhodes*, Transaction Publ., New Brunswick-London 2002.
- Zingano M., "Akrasia and the Method of Ethics", in C. Bobonich-P. Destrée (eds.), *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy. From Socrates to Plotinus*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2007, 167–191.
- Zingano M., "Moral Particularism and Aristotelian Ethics", in G. Rossi (ed.), *Nature and the Best Life. Exploring the Natural Bases of Practical Normativity in Ancient Philosophy*, Olms, Hildesheim-Zürich-NewYork 2013, 95–125.

# Index Nominum et Rerum

- Acerbi, F. 119n51  
Achtenberg, D. 137n88, 209n1  
Ackrill, J.L. 74 and n71, 75 and n73  
*Akrasia* 41n102, 42, 43, 89, 109–110, 112, 124, 129–133, 139, 154–157, 183, 247, 249  
Allan, D.J. 64 and n33, 65 and n38, 72, 73  
Allen, D. 28n67  
Ando, T. 57n16, n17  
Annas, J. 112, 27n62, 156n111  
Anscombe, G.E.M. 58 and n18, n19, 59, 60, 121n57  
Anton, J.P. 209n1  
*Arche*, Sovereignty 2, 4, 19, 22, 23, 167, 169, 172, 189, 213, 217n20, 232, 233, 242, 248  
Aristotle, *passim*  
Arruzza, C. 172n37  
Aubenque, P. 64n34, 65  
Aubry, G. 189n63  
  
Baker, S.H. 202n88, 209n1  
Barnes, J. xii, 113n41, 148n108  
Barney, R. 209n1  
Bartlett, R.C. 160n6  
Bates, C.A., Jr. 173n37  
Berti, E. 7n16, 189n63, 194n69, 207n94  
Bien, G. 2n5  
Bloch, D. 141n93  
Bobonich, C. 27n62, 41n100, 232n38, 237n45  
Bobzien, S. 70n55, 98n16, 103n23, 113n42  
Boeri, M.D. 42n102  
Bolton, R. 207n94  
Bostock, D. 100n19  
*Boulesis* xii, 44, 61, 72, 84–87, 94, 107–110, 121–125, 130–133, 139, 153–157, 176, 216, 219, 238, 247–249  
Broadie, S. 95n4, 121n57, 160n6, 207n94  
Brown, L. 95n4  
Brüllmann, P. 55n10, 69n53  
Burnet, J. 56n11  
Burnyeat, M.F. 82 and n87, 83  
  
Calvo Martínez, T. 21n50  
Cambiano, G. 234n42  
Cammack, D. 100n19, 103n23  
Caston, V. 123n62, 129n75  
Cattanei, E. 108n27, 138n91  
  
Charles, D. 43n104, 95n4, 148n108, 211n5  
Chernyakhovskaya, O. 21n50, 23n55  
Cimon 5n13  
Clarke, B. 81n83  
Classen, C.J. 18n44  
Collins, J.H. 16n41  
Collins, S.D. 160n6  
Coope, U. 85n93, 193n69  
Cooper, J.M. 67, 70, 91, 160n6  
Corcilius, K. 55n10, 69 and n53, 70  
Crubellier, M. 69n52  
Cuomo, S. 119n51  
Curzer, H. 55n10, 85n94,  
  
Dahl, N.O. 121n57  
Democritus 164n10  
Depew, D. 16n40, 18n44  
Destrée, P. 2n5, 41n101, 113n42, 137n87, 232n38  
Devereux, D.T. 81n85, 82, 114n42  
Dihle, A. 14n25  
Dirlmeier, F. 175n42  
Donini, P.L. 37n90, 86n95, 175n42, n44, 177n48  
Düring, I. 35n88, 163, 164n9  
  
Ebrey, D. 190n66  
El Murr, D. 171n29  
Engberg-Pedersen, T. 160n6  
*Epithymia* xii, 44, 87, 94, 109, 112, 123, 124, 125, 130, 131, 132, 133, 138, 139, 155, 156, 157  
Eudemus of Rhodes 120n56  
Everson, S. 202n88, 209n1  
  
Ferrari, G.R.F. 39n94  
Ferrarin, A. 136n87  
Fortenbaugh, W.W. 16n40, 120n56  
Fossheim, H.J. 27n62  
Frank, J. 174n40  
Frede, D. 95n4, 133n82, 245n54  
  
Garver, E. 173n37  
Gastaldi, S. 172n37  
Gauthier, R.A. 160n6  
Gigon, O. 163, 164n9, 165n12

- Gill, M.L. 160n6  
 Gómez-Lobo, A. 209n1  
 Gorgias 15, 16n38, n39, 18n44  
 Gottlieb, P. 70n55, 86n95, 95n4  
 Grant, A. 56n12  
 Gray, V.J. 21n50  
 Greenwood, L.H.G. 56n11  
 Grönroos, G. 44n106  
 Gunderson, E. 16n38
- Hankinson, R.J. 136n87  
 Hardie, W.F.R. 65 and n37, n38, 121n57  
 Harrison, S. 14n25, 26n61, 27n62  
 Haskins, E.V.C. 16n40  
 Henry, D. 114n42, 160n6  
 Hintikka, J. 119n52  
 Hippias of Elis 15, 23 and n55, 24, 39  
 Hippocrates of Chios 120n56  
 Hitz, Z. 194n69  
 Horn, C. 2n5, 21n50, 27n62, 172n37  
*Horos* xii, 5, 10, 12, 78, 94, 159–161, 176–177, 179n50, 184, 199, 215  
 Hübner, J. 210n3, 216n18, n19  
 Hutchinson, D.S. 35n88, 164n9, n10, 165 and n13
- Irwin, T. 160n6, 202n8  
 Isocrates 14–18, 20, 27, 33, 45, 50, 164n10, 168 and n20
- Joachim, H.H. 57n16  
 Jolif, J.Y. 160n6  
 Johnson, M.R. 35n88, 164n9, n10, 165 and n13, 190n66  
 Johnstone, C.L. 16n38  
 Jones, A.R. 119n50, n51
- Karbowsky, J. 114n42  
 Kenny, A. 68 and n47  
 Kraut, R. 78n78, 100n19, 159n4, 160n6, 209n1, 213n11, 234n41, 245n54  
*Krisis* 81, 146, 163, 168, 169, 217  
 Kristjánsson, K. 86n94
- Laks, A. 27n62, 69n52  
 Lane, M. 14n25, 26n61, 27n62, 232n38  
 Lasserre, F. 120n54, n55  
 Leigh, F. 207n93  
 Lennox, J. 207n94
- Leunissen, M. 148n108  
 Lisi, F. 2n5  
 Lockwood, T. 232n38  
 Lorenz, H. 85n94, 193n69  
 Loudon, R.B. 81n83
- Mansfeld, J. 119n51  
 McDowell, J. 76 and n75, 77, 80 and n81  
 Mele, A.R. 69n51  
 Menn, S. 118n49, 119n52  
 Merker, A. 100n19  
 Mignucci, M. 144n97, 156n111  
 Miller, F.D. 69n51  
 Mingay, J.M. 176n45  
 Montanari, F. 14n25  
 Moss, J. 70n55, 87n96, 103n23, 130n79, 137n87, 138n91  
 Müller, Jörn 209n1  
 Müller, Jozef 106n26
- Narcy, M. 21n50  
 Natali, C. 43n104, 68, 108n27, 120n53, 147n107, 148n108, 189n63, 209n1  
 Nielsen, K.M. 98n16, 106n26, 108n27, 114n43, 160n6  
 Nikulin, D. 172n37  
*Nomos* x, 2 and n5, 3–5, 12, 13, 19, 21, 22–29, 45, 48–50, 71, 78, 80, 82, 125, 162, 170–174, 181, 201, 242–245  
*Nous*, Intellect, Understanding 80, 94, 124, 131–133, 138, 139, 146, 174, 179, 246  
 Nussbaum, M.C. 67 and n43, 68n46, 76, 77 and n77, 133n82
- Organon*, Instrument 39, 75, 150, 207, 208, 210, 211, 218, 220, 222, 225–231, 235, 239
- Pakaluk, M. 76n75, 77n77, 160n6, 209n1, 218n21  
 Pearson, G. 76n75, 77n77, 123n62  
 Pellegrin, P. 226n31, 228n32  
 Peterson, S. 160n6  
 Petrucci, F.M. 39n94  
 Plato 2n5, n7, 15, 16n39, 18, 20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 33, 35, 39, 40, 45–49, 50, 64 and n33, 82, 118n49, 141, 146, 164–173, 181, 224, 232, 234n42, 236n44, 242  
 Polansky, R. 70n55, 95n4, 108n27, 123n62, 134n82, 137n87, 165n13

- Politis, V. 30n73, 216n18  
 Poulakos, J. 18n44  
 Poulakos, T. 16n40, 18n44  
 Preus, A. 209n1  
 Price, A.W. 62n25, 76n75, 81n83, 94n2  
 Prodicus of Ceos 15, 164n10  
 Protagoras 15  
  
 Raaflaub, K.A. 14n25  
 Rapp, C. 55n10, 69n53  
 Rashed, M. 69n52  
 Reeve, C.D.C. 4n11, 160n6, 209n1, 218n21,  
     244n53  
 Remes, U. 119n52  
 Renahan, R.F. 28n67  
 Rese, F. 160n6  
 Riesbeck, D.J. 162n8  
 Rodrigo, P. 189n63  
 Romeyer-Dherbey G. 189n63  
 Rorty Oksenberg, A. 72n65, 74n71, 75n73,  
     82n87  
 Rosler, A. 162n8, 223n26  
 Ross, W.D. 4n11, 5n12, 6n14, 56n13, 57 and  
     n14, 160n6, 163n9  
 Rowe, C.J. 5n12, 14n25, 26n61, 27n62, 31n75,  
     32n77, 121n57  
  
 Salmieri, G. 114n42  
 Samaras, T. 232n38  
 Santas, G. 11n22  
 Schofield, M. 14n25, 26n61, 27n62  
 Segvic, H. 77n77  
 Simpson, P.L.P. 37n90, 121n57, 175n42, n44  
 Slings, S.R. 32n77, n78  
  
 Skultety, S. 245n54  
 Socrates 16n38, 21 and n49, n50, 23 and n55,  
     24, 25, 29–44, 50, 166  
 Stewart, A.W. 14n25  
 Susemihl, F. 176 n45  
 Szabó, A. 119n52  
  
 Taylor, C.C.W. 121n57, 160n6  
 Terrel, J. 232n38  
 Themistocles 3n13  
 Tordesillas, A. 7n16, 21n50  
  
 Urmsen, J.O. 95n4  
  
 Vegetti, M. 78n78  
 Viano, C. 147n107, 148n108  
 Vigo, A.G. 209n1  
  
 Walzer, R.R. 176n45  
 Wareh, T. 16n40  
 White, N. 81n83  
 Wiggins, D. 72 and n65, 73, 74, 75, 85n94  
 Woods, M. 5n12, 37n90, 41n102, 175n42, n44  
 Wright, G.H., von 60 and n20, 61 and n22,  
     62, 63  
  
 Xenophon 15, 16, 21 and n50, 23, 24, 25, 39,  
     40, 50  
  
 Yuridin, J. 136n87  
  
 Zhmud, L. 120n56  
 Zingano, M. 41n101, 81n83, 113n42, 147n107,  
     148n108

Index Locorum

Andocides			
In Alcibiadem			
42, 3	168n18	431b7–8	122n59
De mysteriis		432a15–20	128n72
82	22n54	432a25–26	123
84	22n54	432a31–b7	123 and n62
85	22n54	432b5	123
Aristoteles		432b5–6	104n24
Analytica priora		432b15–17	129n73
24a25 ff.	157n112	432b26–27	104n24
24b10	112n37	432b26–433a8	130 and n80, 132
25b33	125n67	433a1	50n121
26a3	125n67	433a1–8	249
26a6	125n67	433a10–24	1n1
26b31–32	193n68	433a13–14	81n84
28a7	112n36	433a13–25	131 and n81
29b20	156n111	433a14	94n2, 246n1
33b5	125n67	433a14–17	95n5
33b15	125n67	433a15–16	122n58
34a25–28	112n39	433a15–21	124n63
36a6	156n111	433a16–18	246n1
40b23–24	112 and n38	433a18–19	54n2, 54n5
41a26–28	113n40	433a23–25	122n60, 124n64
42b21	156n111	433a26–27	55n7
43b34f.	193n68	433b5 ff.	138
48b2	125n67	433b5–12	124–125 and n66
53b8–10	184n54	433b27–29	135 and n85
57a36–b4	184n54	433b29	137n88
59b19	125n67	434a5–10	122n61
67a24	156n111	434a5–15	136 and n86,
69a21–23	125n67		137n87
Analytica posteriora		434a6	137n88
71a23	125n67	434a6–7	122n60
72a15–21	113n41	434a9	138
72a18–20	96n8	434a16	64n33
72a20	113	434a16–21	54, 139–140 and
76b35–39	114 and n43		n92
89a2–5	239n48	434b26–28	124n65
94b8–21	147	Categoriae	
100b10–11	174n40	4a34–4b12	240
De anima		6b2–3	202
407a23–25	94n3	8b27	202
427b14–25	129n75	14b1	116
428a16–22	240	Ethica Eudemea	
431b6–10	134–135 and n83	1214a14	95n4
		1216b3–21	36
		1216b16–20	216n17
		1216b35	95n4

*Ethica Eudemea (cont.)*

1216b35–1217a10	54
1217a5–6	54n1
1217a6–7	246n1
1217b26–40	213n9
1217b26–42	186n57
1218b14–15	187n58
1218b37–1219a1	202n89, 203
1218b37–1219a39	209n1
1219a6–18	204
1219b3–4	101n21
1219b30	50n120
1220a5–11	173 and n40, 181
1220a9	50n120
1220a38–39	11n21
1220a38–b6	84n90, 175 and n41
1220b5	50n120, 85
1220b5–9	246n3
1220b16–20	199n80
1221b30–32	85n92
1221b38–39	11n21
1222a5 ff.	5
1222a6–8	95n5
1222a6–12	2n4
1222a7–22	85n92
1226a27–1227a10	54
1222b5–8	2n4
1223a37–b2	129
1224b1–2	11n35
1225b36–1226a17	152
1226a8–12	98n15
1226a10	71n61
1226a13–17	1n1
1226a27–28	98n13
1226b6–7	98n15
1226b6–15	98n13
1226b10–13	97n12, 144n96
1226b12–13	122n58
1226b16	70n56
1226b16–17	1n1
1226b17	247n4
1226b24	96n9
1227a6–18	99 and n17
1227a8–9	108, 118
1227a9	96n7
1227a9–10	55
1227a11	70n56
1227a12–13	101
1227a18–20	122n58

1227b5–11	85n92
1227b8	11n21
1227b25–28	96n9
1227b29–30	118
1227b34–39	71n58
1231b13–15	186n56
1231b33–35	2n4
1233b1–7	186n56
1233b16–18	84n91
1233b37–38	186n56
1235b24–26	108n30
1235b30	108
1235b30–34	108–109 and n31
1237b36–1238a2	158n2
1238b1–6	109 and n32
1238b6	108
1242a11–18	206
1246a26 ff.	37
1246a33	39n95
1246a33–35	38n93
1246b8–12	38 and n92
1246b12–36	41
1246b19–25	42–43 and n103
1246b33–34	41n100
1247a8	95n5
1248b36	95n5
1249a21	215
1249a21–b8	160n5
1249a21–b23	176–177 and n46
1249b14	38n91, 50n120,
	181n52
1249b15	50n120
1249b16	180
1249b17	178
1249b20	178

*Ethica nicomachea*

1094a1	95n4
1094a3–4	211
1094a3–18	210 and n2
1094a11	101n21
1094a14	55n6
1094a18–24	212 and n6
1094a25–b7	189–190 and n65
1094a27	55n6
1094b1–2	214n15
1094b7–10	214n4
1094b11	95n4
1094b13–16	83
1095b2–13	82

1096a20-29	213n9	113b4	70n56
1096a20-34	11n22	114b30	50n120
1096b30-31	213n10	116a36	50n120
1096b31-34	212n7	117b10-15	71n62
1096b34-1097a3	212n8	119b13	50n120
1096b35-1097a13	11 and n23	1126b29-30	73n66
1097a3-13	212n9	1127a7-8	73n66
1097a14-23	221 and n25	1127a15-17	85n92
1097b22-34	221 and n24	1128b29-30	109n32
1097b25-1098a20	203n90, 209n1	1129a6	95n
1098a3	95n5	1129b19	50n120
1098a4-5	11n35	1129b14-19	71n63
1098a29	95n4	1129b15	73n66
1098b21-22	211n5	1129b18-24	150n1
1099b29-32	71n63, 95n5	1130b23-24	50n120
1101a14-15	71n62	1135b3-8	72n64
1102a5-17	71n62	1136b31	50n120
1103a17-19	11	1137b27-32	244 and n53
1103b26-1104a10	6n14	1138b18-25	2n4
1104a7	8	1138b18-34	10
1104a7-9	186n56	1138b23	160n6, 215
1105a34	72n64	1138b23-34	160-161 and n7
1105b16	50n120	1138b30 ff.	25n58
1105b19 ff.	199	1138b34	160n6
1106b15-16	73n66	1139a8-17	177-178
1106b25-26	2n4	1139a21-27	159 and n3
1106b28	73n66	1139a21-31	55
1109a22	73n66	1139a23	71n59
1109a30	73n66	1139a24	55n7
1110a4-13	79-80	1139a26-27	54n5
1110a5	50n120	1139a34-35	211n5
1111b5-6	85n92	1139a35-36	54n1, 94n2
1111b26-27	71n58	1139a35-b1	54n1
1111b30-1112a7	153-154 and 1110	1139a35-b4	219 and n23
1112a34-b24	102 and n22	1139b2-3	216, 217
1112b9	103n23	1139b3-4	101, 211n5
1112b1-1113a10	54	1139b27	55n8
1112b11-19	125	1140a1-10	217 and n21
1112b13 ff.	71n60	1140a1-11	111n34, 219, 222
1112b15	96n6	1140a16-18	111n34
1112b15-18	98n14	1140a24-26	188n60
1112b15-27	118n49	1140a25	144n98
1112b18-23	122n58	1140a26-31	144 and 1100
1112b20-21	96n10, 108	1140a31-b2	144n98
1112b23	74n68	1140b2-7	218 and n22
1112b23-24	117, 125	1140b3-4	219
1112b27-34	70n56	1140b4-7	111n34
1112b28-31	143n95	1140b7	211n5
1113a10-11	71n59	1141b8-14	144n98

*Ethica nicomachea (cont.)*

1141b15–16	79n79, 144 and 1101
1141b22–29	188 and n61
1141b23–25	55n
1141b27–28	244n53
1141b28	122n58
1142a14–15	79n79
1142a21–1142b33	54
1142a30	144n99
1142b17–26	183 and n53, 185
1142b30–31	144n98
1142b32–33	144n98
1143a4–10	145 and 1104
1143a7–8	38n91
1143a8	50n120
1143a11–15	146n104
1143a30–33	144n99
1143a32–33	79n79
1143a32–b3	144–145 and 1102
1143b35	50n120
1144a1–8	71n62
1144a13–14	72n64
1144a28–36	144n99
1144a31–32	58
1144a31–33	142n94, 143
1144a32–33	185
1144b1–8	200n83
1144b10–17	38n91
1144b32–1145a2	34n82
1145a9	50n120
1145a11	50n120
1145b21–27	43
1146a6–8	144n99
1147a5–6	55
1147a25 ff.	63n27
1147a25–31	156, 157
1147a25–b10	54
1147a31	58
1147a31–b3	129–130
1147a35–b3	44n105
1151a11–19	111
1151a17	118
1158a32	50n120
1164b28–29	71n15
1167a14–15	72n64
1167a16	211n5
1177a11–22	178–179 and 49
1178a23–25	179
1178b8–32	179

1179a22–27	180
1179b7–18	201 and n84
1179b26–31	201 and n85
1180a21–22	173n38
1180b8–20	71n16
1181a19–b11	8 and 117
1181b1–8	201n87
1181b2	8

*De memoria et reminiscientia*

449b23–27	138n90
450a27–32	138n90
451a2–8	138n90
451b19–20	141
453a6–14	140 and n93
453a15–19	69n51

*Metaphysica*

982a18	50n121
993b20–24	204 and n91
993b20–27	90n99
998a25	116
998a25–27	116n46
1005a11–13	115 and n44
1013a13–14	55n6
1013a29–b3	146 and 1109
1014a35–b1	117n47
1014a36	116
1019b5–6	202
1022b10–12	202
1025b7–12	108n28
1025b7–13	115n45
1025b18–28	94n1
1025b25	54n3, 57n15
1026b4–5	57n15
1027a24–25	84n89
1032a32–b21	102, 105 and n25, 147
1032b5	74n68, 100
1032b5–20	122n58
1032b6–7	100
1032b15–21	107
1050a21–36	207n94
1051a20–25	108n29
1051a21–33	117, 118
1064a10–11	57n15, 94n1
1064a10–15	94n1
1070b27	127
1086b34–35	108n29

*De motu animalium*

700b25–26	111
701a7–36	54, 57



701a9-15	55n9	1282b1-6	2n6, 242 and n49
701a10-30	155	1282b2-6	7n15
701a12-13	58, 60	1282b5	172n33
701a15-17	68n46	1286a7-9	2n7
701a18-23	65n37	1286a7-27	3 and n9
701a22	68n46	1286a8-25	172n36
701a23-25	64n29	1286a9-25	2n8
701a29-30	124n65	1286a11	50n119
701a30-33	68n46, 157	1286a21-28	12n24
701b31	58	1286a22-25	173n38
701a31-32	129	1287a20-30	3n9
<i>Physica</i>		1287a21	5
194b1-4	54n6	1287b15-23	242 and n50
<i>Poetica</i>		1287b16-20	7n15
1456b15-18	15n37	1287b16-24	4n10
<i>Politica</i>		1287b22	244
1252a1-7	223n27	1292a20	50n119
1252a7-22	224 and n28	1292a32-33	172n33
1253b23-1254a8	225 and n30, 227	1292a32-36	4n11
1254a1-8	222	1299a15 ff.	173n39
1254a2	235	1299a24	213n12
1254a16-17	235	1299a25-27	4n10
1255b28-35	229n33	1299a25-28	244 and n52
1255b33-37	101n20	1299a26-27	50n119
1255b35	50n119	1299a26-28	12n24
1256a3-13	230 and n34	1323b13-18	164n9
1256a6-9	101n20	1325a26	50n119
1258a20 ff.	233	1325b10-23	21n5
1258a20-35	231 and n35	1325b18	54n4
1258a24-34	233n40	1326b12-18	217n20
1260a12-13	239n47	1326b13-15	146n105, 213n12
1260b6	50n119	1326b14	50n119
1262a23-24	239n46	1331b24-26	162n8
1268b39-40	172n34	1331b26-38	162n8
1269a9-11	7n15	1332a7-12	162n8
1269a10-11	172n35	1333a6	50n119
1269a10-18	2n6	1333a24-25	94n2
1269a11-12	172n33	1333b26-30	72n63
1275b19	169n23	<i>Protrepticus</i>	
1276b20-29	211n4	4 Ross	163 and n9, 166,
1276b24	101n21		180, 187, 190
1277a5-12	234n41	6 Ross	163, 167
1277a33-b7	101n20	<i>Rhetorica</i>	
1277b25-29	48n115	1366b20-21	144n98
1277b29-31	47n114	1367a4	211n5
1281b40-1282a3	231 and n36	1369a1-4	87n96
1282a1 ff.	173n39	1370a19-25	174n40
1282a3	55n6	1385a16-b7	186n57
1282b1-3	173n38	1387b23	211n5

*Topica*

101b13–15	96n8
101b29–32	113n42
101b31–32	106n26
101b31–33	96n8
104b1ff.	157n112
104b1–7	137n89
107a5–12	186n57
114b8–13	35n85
121b24–30	35n87
121b30ff.	35n87
121b37–38	35n87
126a13	123, 124
128b19	50n121, 246n3
129a11–13	169n23
145a15–16	57n15
145a30	169n23
152a39–b2	35n87
158a15–18	113n42
160a33–34	113n42

*Sophistici elenchi*

175b9–10	113n42
175b13–14	113n42
176a10–11	113n42
176a15–16	113n42

**Democritus***Fragmenta* (ed. Diels-Kranz)

68 B 37	164n10
68 B 40	164n10
68 B 77	164n10
68 B 172	164n10
68 B 173	164n10

**Diogenes Laertius***Vitae clarorum philosophorum*

ix 50	15n34, 22n54
ix 55	15n34

**Gorgias***Helenae Encomium*

8, 12, 14	16n39
-----------	-------

*Testimonia* (ed. Diels-Kranz)

82 A 11	16n39
---------	-------

**Herodotus***Historiae*

i 103	214n16
i 114	214n16

vi 107

214n16

**Isocrates***Ad Alexandrum*

4	20n47
---	-------

*Antidosis*

150, 4	168m18
188, 7	168n20
203, 5	14n26

*Archidamus*

7, 5	168m18
8, 2	168m18

*Areopagiticus*

2, 4	168m18
64, 5	168m18

*In Callimachum*

49, 4	135n84
-------	--------

*Busiris*

18, 4	168m19
-------	--------

*Ad Demonium*

29, 1	135n84
51, 5	14n26

*Helenae Encomium*

9, 5	14n26
------	-------

*Nicocles*

13, 6	168m18
51, 1	168m18
56, 7	168m19

*Ad Nicoclem*

34, 3	168m19
-------	--------

*De pace*

16, 6	168n20
-------	--------

*Panathenaicus*

67, 5	168m18
79, 8	168m18

*Panegyricus*

3, 6	14n26
------	-------

*Philippus*

12	15n32
12, 8	14n26

*In sophistas*

9–10	16n38
14, 5	14n26
21, 2	168n20

**Lycurgus***Oratio in Leocratem*

102	29n68
-----	-------

**Pappus Alexandrinus***Collectio* (ed. Hultsch)

2, 634–636 119 and n50

**Philippus Opuntius***Fragmenta* (ed. Lasserre)

5 120n55

20 120n54

**Plato***Alcibiades I*

130e8 30n69

*Apologia Socratis*

23a–b 31n74

25c 35n86

28b8 45n110

29c6–8 31n74

31d 31n76

33c1 31n74

34b1–4 34n81

*Charmides*

156e 30n70

164d–165a 30n70

[*Clitophon*]

407b–d 32

407d–e 32

408a–b 32

408b7 30n73

[*Eryxias*]

397d 164n10

*Euthydemus*

275a 30n70

279e 211n5

280a–281e 35n84

280d–281e 166

280e1–281a1 166n14

280e–281e 164n10

281b2 211n5

282c 30n73

288a 16n38

291a 34n83

291c5–6 189n64

292d 30n72

*Gorgias*

449c 16n38

450c1–2 15n38

456b–c 12n39

457c 34n83

465c 15n33

467e–468b 35n84

472c 16n38

474d–e 164n10

475e 16n38

484c–485c 31n74

488c–d 41n100

507d6–7 45n110

521d7 189n64

*Hippias Minor*

374a5 40

374a7 40

374a8 40

374b2 40

374d7 40

374e–375b 39, 42n102

374e1 40

*Laches*

186c3 14n27

198c 35n84

199b–c 30n72

*Leges*

720b2 ff. 27n63

720b2–d7 27n64

720d–e 16n39

721b1–2 28n65

721b4–c2 28n66

757a–d 232n39

822e2–4 172n32

857d–e 16n39

875d–c 171

932a 214n16

*Meno*

70a 30n73

86d 30n73

87c–d 30n72

87e–88c 35n84

88a–89b 164n10

88c 30n71

89c 30n71

95b 30n73

*Phaedo*

63e10 31n74

67c 135n84

73a5–10 34n81

74a ff. 141

94a1 34n81

*Phaedrus*

242c 31n76

266a–b 16n38

*Phaedrus (cont.)*

271b	214n16
271e-272a	64n33
275d4-9	171n30

*Politicus*

259a-c	224
259c1-3	225n29
260a4-b5	169n21
260a10	169n22
260b-c	146
260c1-d9	169n24
261b-c	169n21
263e8-9	169n21
267a8-9	169n21
276c7	189n64
276e12	189n64
280a1	189n64
292a	2n7
292c	2n7
293a-c	2n7
294a7-b6	171n29
294c1-4	171n30
294d-e	33n79
294d3-e6	171n28
295b10-296a2	171n29
297b-c	232n39
304a-305e	25
304a1-2	26n59
304e5-11	26n60
304e9	26
305c9-d4	26n61

*Protagoras*

311e-312c	14n27
312d-e	16n38
314b	16n38
314c1	14n27
316c-317c	14n27
318e5-319a2	15n36
319a-b	30n73
319a-320c	232n39
319a4	189n64
320b-c	30n73
322b5	189n64
324c	30n73
328a-b	16n38
329a1-b1	171n30
329e	34n82
330b	30n72
334d-336b	16n38

343b	30n70
344b	16n38
345a3-4	211n5
349a2	14n27
353b-c	41n100
357e	15n30
358a-e	35n86
361a-b	30n72

*Respublica*

339d6-8	45n108
339e	45n108
340a5	45n108
342c11-13	45
342e3	45n108
346e-347a	46n111
352e-353e	203n90
359a3-4	45n109
403c-410a	48
405a6-b3	48n116
409a	48n117
423c2-5	45n109
423d9	170n26
424c3-6	48n118
425a8	48
425d7	45n108
425d7-e7	48n118
438e	30n72
453b10	45n108, 170n26
455e4	45n108
527c1	45n108, 170n26
527d6	45n108, 170n26
530c3	45n108, 170n26
556b1	45n108
601d-e	46
601d4-6	46n112
601d8-602a1	47 and n113
601d-602a	236n44

*Symposium*

216a4-b4	31n75
223d11	31n74

*Prodicus Ceus**Fragmenta* (ed. Diels-Kranz)

84 B 8	164n10
--------	--------

*Thucydides**Historiae*

i 95, 7	135n84
i 139	19n46

i 140, 2	168n17
i 141, 1	168n17
ii 88, 1	135n84
iv 103	214n16
v 40, 3	135n84
viii 104	214n16

**Xenophon**

*Cynegeticus*

13, 1	15n28
13, 9	15n28

*Cyropaedia*

ii 3, 4	168n17
v 3, 50, 1	168n17
vii 5, 63, 3	168n18

*Hellenica*

ii 3, 1	22n53
ii 3, 11, 3-4	22n53

*Hiero*

9, 3, 2	168n17
---------	--------

*Memorabilia*

i 2, 19-20	21
i 2, 31	16n38, 22n53
i 2, 42 ff.	21, 23
i 2, 42, 1-5	21n51
i 2, 43, 1-7	22n52
i 2, 44	23
i 2, 44, 1-45, 6	22n53
i 3, 1	21
iii 3, 9	24
iv 2, 16-40	39
iv 2, 24-30	40n96
iv 2, 31-32	40n97
iv 2, 33	40n97
iv 2, 36	40n99
iv 4, 3, 4	168n17
iv 4, 14	23n56
iv 6, 2-4	24n57

*Oeconomicus*

15, 2-3	25n58
15, 6-7	25n58